

A Systematic Review of Animated Storytelling as a Medium to Represent P. Ramlee's Film Legacy

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Received: 11 August 2026; Accepted: 30 August 2026; Published: 1 September 2026

ABSTRACT

The potential of animated storytelling as a medium to depict and preserve the cinematic heritage of P. Ramlee, one of Malaysia's most significant cultural icons, is examined in this systematic review. Due to shifting media consumption patterns, linguistic disparities, and a lack of exposure on digital platforms, younger audiences' interest in classic Malay films has decreased in recent years. This study uses the PRISMA 2020 framework to synthesise the body of research on animation, digital storytelling, cultural preservation, and film history in order to address this challenge. Nine pertinent papers that were published between 2010 and 2025 were chosen and subjected to theme analysis. Three major topics surfaced: character design with emotional engagement, narrative structure and storytelling strategies in animation, and cultural narrative representation in animated storytelling. The results show that animation may adapt structured narratives, preserve cultural values, and create emotional relationships with viewers in ways that are consistent with the storytelling elements of P. Ramlee's films. Overall, the assessment emphasises animation as an appropriate modern medium for extending and reinterpreting P. Ramlee's cinematic heritage for younger audiences. By providing insights into how animated storytelling might bridge generational divides and preserve the relevance of classic Malaysian cinema in the digital age, the study adds to the conversation on cultural sustainability.

Keywords: P. Ramlee, Animated storytelling, Cultural preservation, Emotional Engagement



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1 INTRODUCTION

In recent years, concerns have emerged regarding the declining engagement of younger audiences with the cinematic legacy of P. Ramlee (1929–1973). Hashim (2023) notes that younger generations no longer watch films through traditional broadcast channels, preferring on-demand streaming services such as Netflix. This change in viewing habits has reduced exposure to classic Malay films, which are rarely featured on these digital platforms. Furthermore, linguistic differences have widened the generational gap, as the Malay language and expressions used in P. Ramlee's films may be difficult for younger viewers to understand (Hashim, 2023).

P. Ramlee, one of Malaysia's most influential cultural icons, shaped the nation's film identity through his work as an actor, director, composer, and storyteller (Teo, 2016). His films, known for humour, music, and social themes, reflect the life and values of mid-20th-century Malaya. However, younger audiences today have less exposure to his classic works, weakening cultural connection (TwentyTwo13, 2025). Animated storytelling offers a way to address this gap by using movement, visuals, sound, and narrative structure to simplify complex ideas, retell historical stories, and present P. Ramlee's characters, themes, and cultural messages in a fresh, engaging format (Zhang & Ismail, 2023;

Huang et al., 2023). In Malaysia, adapting classic films through animation and transmedia storytelling demonstrates how digital creative methods can help revive and sustain P. Ramlee's cultural relevance for future generations (Wan Muhammad et al., 2025; Mohd Hasri & Md Syed, 2024).

Despite this potential, research specifically on how animated storytelling can reinterpret and sustain P. Ramlee's cinematic legacy is still limited. Most studies focus on Malaysian cultural heritage broadly, without examining his body of work in depth (Zhang & Ismail, 2023). Moreover, although the generational gap in appreciating P. Ramlee is recognised, few researchers explore how animation can help bridge this gap (TwentyTwo13, 2025). Therefore, this review synthesises research from narrative structure, character, visuals, and sound to identify current trends, theoretical approaches, and gaps in existing literature. It also examines how animated storytelling can function not only as a mode of remembrance but as a contemporary medium to reimagine P. Ramlee for future audiences. Ultimately, this study aims to contribute to cultural sustainability by offering insights into how digital creative practices can preserve and extend the legacy of Malaysia's most celebrated cinematic figure.

1.1 Problem Statement

The cultural and linguistic nuances of mid-twentieth century cinema are increasingly distant from contemporary youth, leading to a diminished appreciation of these works. Hashim (2023) also emphasises that static heritage exhibitions, such as traditional museum displays, fail to capture the interest of today's digital-native audiences, who prefer interactive and visually engaging content.

These issues collectively highlight a broader challenge: the declining accessibility and relevance of Malaysia's classic film heritage among younger audiences. Although P. Ramlee's works remain culturally significant, the combined effects of changing media consumption, linguistic evolution, and outdated heritage presentation methods have weakened intergenerational connections. Thus, the central problem can be articulated as follows: How can the cinematic legacy of P. Ramlee be effectively preserved and communicated to younger audiences with narrative structure, character development, visuals, and sound?

1.1.1 Research Objective

This study aims to analyse existing literature to understand how animated storytelling contributes to the preservation and reinterpretation of P. Ramlee's cultural memory and legacy. Specifically, it examines how researchers, artists, and cultural practitioners have used animation to retell historical stories, revive classic film narratives, and introduce cultural icons to new audiences. By reviewing studies across animation, digital storytelling, film heritage, and cultural preservation and cultural representation, this research identifies core elements of animated storytelling, including narrative structure, character development, visuals, sound, and engagement of emotional expression. It also evaluates how animation functions as a modern medium to make P. Ramlee's stories more accessible, engaging, and relevant for younger generations. Ultimately, the study highlights existing knowledge, identifies gaps, and explores how animated storytelling can support the long-term preservation of P. Ramlee's legacy.

1.2 Research Gaps

Although P. Ramlee's films are widely recognised as significant cultural artefacts, there is limited academic research on how animated storytelling can specifically preserve and reinterpret his cinematic legacy. Most existing studies focus on Malaysian cultural heritage, national cinema, or animation independently, without exploring the intersection between these fields. Furthermore, while younger audiences have less exposure to P. Ramlee's work, few studies examine how animation can bridge this generational gap. Current research also lacks a systematic synthesis of narrative strategies, characterisation, visual design, and sound in animated adaptations of classic Malay films. This gap highlights the need for a comprehensive systematic literature review to consolidate existing knowledge,

identify trends, and provide insights into how animated storytelling can effectively sustain and modernise P. Ramlee’s cultural relevance for contemporary audiences.

2 MATERIAL AND METHODS

This study adopts the PRISMA 2020 model (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) to guide the systematic review process. The review is carried out through three main stages: identification, screening, and eligibility. In the identification stage, relevant academic sources are gathered from selected databases using keywords related to animation, animated storytelling, cultural heritage, and P. Ramlee. The screening stage involves removing duplicated records and excluding sources that do not meet the basic requirements of the study, such as articles unrelated to animation, digital storytelling, or Malaysian cultural heritage. The eligibility stage includes a detailed evaluation of the remaining articles to determine their relevance and quality based on predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Through these steps, the PRISMA 2020 approach ensures that only credible, high-quality, and directly relevant literature is included in the final review.

2.1 Identification

Identifying related and synonymous terms through dictionaries, thesauruses, encyclopaedias, and previous studies forms the foundational step in the keyword identification process. In this study, the selected keywords are digital storytelling, animated storytelling, animation, and P. Ramlee. As summarised in Table 1, search strings incorporating these keywords were applied in Google Scholar, a primary search engine for locating relevant academic materials. This preliminary stage of the systematic review yielded a total of 63 publications from Google Scholar.

Table 1 The Search Strings

Category	Description
Google Scholar	(“digital storytelling” OR “animated storytelling”) AND (“animation”) AND (“P. Ramlee”) AND (“Malaysia film icon”) (“digital storytelling” OR “animated storytelling”) AND (“malay film”)

2.2 Screening

A total of 63 articles were initially obtained and prepared for the screening stage, which represents the second phase of the systematic review process. At this stage, the titles, abstracts, and main content of each article were assessed for relevance to the research topic. Exclusion criteria included: publication outside the 2010–2025 range, lack of alignment with the primary keywords (Digital Storytelling, Animated Storytelling, and P. Ramlee), duplication, and non-English language publications. Following the application of these criteria, 41 articles were deemed relevant and were subsequently selected for further assessment in the eligibility phase.

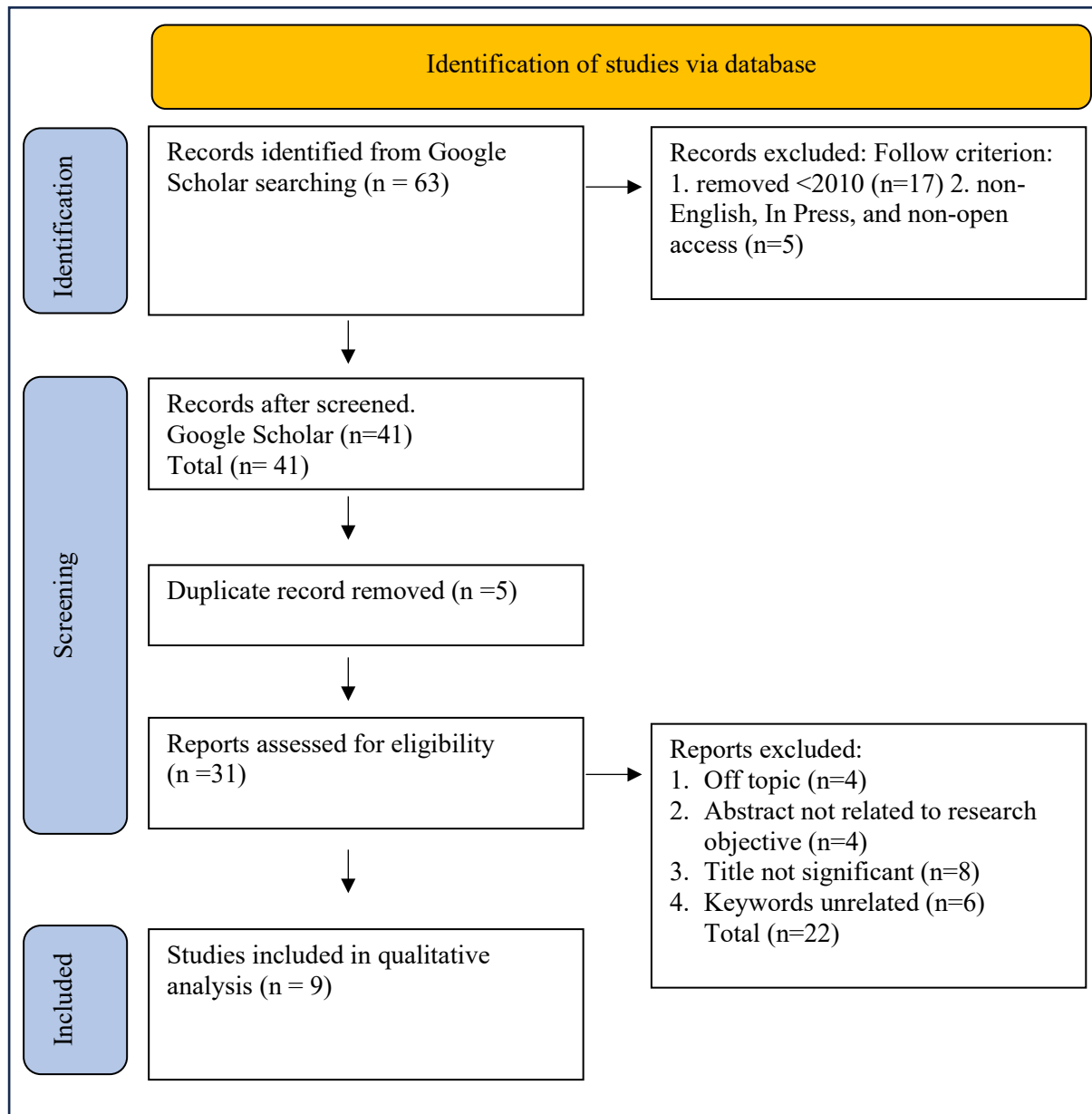
2.3 Eligibility

A total of 41 articles proceeded to the third step, the eligibility phase, for potential inclusion in the study. This stage required a comprehensive full-text assessment to verify that each article offered substantial insights related to the core research keywords: digital storytelling, animated storytelling, animation, and P. Ramlee. The eligibility process applied several criteria, such as English language article, publication timeline, and overall relevance to the research topic. Only articles that fulfilled all these conditions were retained for the final analysis.

Table 2 The selection criteria for the searching

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Language	English	Non-English
Timeline	2010-2025	<2010
Relevance to research topic	Relevant to Digital Storytelling, Animated Storytelling, and P. Ramlee	Not related to research keywords

3 RESEARCH DESIGN



4 FINDINGS

This systematic review synthesised selected studies to evaluate the capacity of animated storytelling as a medium for representing P. Ramlee's film legacy. Through thematic analysis, three dominant themes were identified: Cultural Narrative Representation in Animated Storytelling, narrative structure and storytelling techniques in animation, and character design with emotional engagement. These themes collectively demonstrate how animation can function as a culturally, narratively, and emotionally competent medium for cinematic legacy representation.

4.1 Cultural Narrative Representation in Animated Storytelling

The findings indicate that animation serves as an effective medium for articulating cultural identity, moral values, and social narratives. Abdul Ghani (2015) illustrates that Malaysian animation integrates local cultural norms, ethical principles, and everyday social practices through narrative and visual strategies. This cultural embedding positions animation as a contemporary extension of traditional storytelling practices. Such findings align with the cultural role of P. Ramlee's films, which consistently foregrounded Malay identity, social cohesion, and moral reflection. Consequently, animation demonstrates the capacity to preserve and reinterpret culturally rooted narratives in ways that remain accessible and relevant to contemporary audiences.

Table 3 Summary of Cultural Narrative Representation in Animated Storytelling

Authors	Title/Journal	Methodology	Results	Advantages
Fatimah Muhd Shukri, Azmul Fadhli Kamaruzaman & Yuhanis Ibrahim (2024)	Unveiling Malaysia's Film Heritage of The Creative Cultural Industry <i>International Conference on Languages and Communication (ICLC2024)</i>	Analytical literature review of Malaysian heritage films and policies	Malaysian heritage films play a crucial role in preserving cultural identity; government policies (DIKN, MyDIGITAL) and emerging technologies (VR/AR/XR) enhance cultural representation	Strengthens theoretical understanding of heritage film as national cinema; highlights policy and technology as enablers for cultural sustainability
Wan Muhammad, Siti Zanariah & Isyaku Hassan (2025)	Visual Revival: The Art of Animation Adaptation in Retelling Malay Classic Film <i>International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences</i>	Qualitative: focus group discussions, visual analysis, humour and symbolism analysis of selected Malay classic films	Animation adaptation can successfully revive Malay classic films while preserving cultural symbols, humour, and moral values; visual style enhances accessibility for younger audiences	Demonstrates animation as an effective tool for cultural preservation and reinterpretation; bridges classic cinema with contemporary media consumption
Dahlan Bin Abdul Ghani (2015)	P.Ramlee's Laksamana Do Re Mi : The Study of Interactive Comic Film Adaptation <i>Historia y Comunicación Social</i>	Qualitative content analysis focusing on narrative, character archetypes, visual culture, and storytelling in <i>Upin & Ipin</i>	Demonstrated that <i>Upin & Ipin</i> successfully embeds Malaysian cultural, moral, and Islamic values through storytelling and character design	Shows animation as an effective cultural preservation and educational medium; supports animation as soft power for national identity

4.2 Narrative Structure and Storytelling Techniques in Animation

The findings indicate that animation serves as an effective medium for articulating cultural identity, moral values, and social narratives. Abdul Ghani (2015) illustrates that Malaysian animation integrates local cultural norms, ethical principles, and everyday social practices through narrative and visual strategies. This cultural embedding positions animation as a contemporary extension of traditional storytelling practices. Such findings align with the cultural role of P. Ramlee's films, which consistently foregrounded Malay identity, social cohesion, and moral reflection. Consequently, animation demonstrates the capacity to preserve and reinterpret culturally rooted narratives in ways that remain accessible and relevant to contemporary audiences.

Table 4 Summary of Narrative Structure and Storytelling Techniques in Animation

Authors	Title/Journal	Methodology	Results	Advantages
Mohamad Razeef Shah, Prof. Datuk Ts. Dr Ahmad Rafi, Dr. Vimala Perumal (2022)	A Conceptual Model of Malaysian Computer Animation Storytelling	Conceptual framework development based on literature synthesis	Proposes a structured storytelling model integrating culture, narrative structure, and animation principles in Malaysian computer animation	Offers a foundational conceptual model useful for future empirical studies and animation design practice in Malaysia
Dahlan Abdul Ghani (2016)	P.Ramlee's Laksamana Do Re Mi : The Study of Interactive Comic Film Adaptation <i>International Conference on Information and Communication Technology (ICICTM)</i>	Design-based research: interactive comic prototype development adapted from film	Interactive digital comics adapted from P. Ramlee's film increase engagement among digital natives while maintaining original narrative and cultural essence	Introduces interactive comics as an innovative heritage adaptation medium; expands film studies into interactive storytelling and digital learning contexts
Mohamad Razeef Shah, Mohamed Eshaq Ahmad Rafi & Vimala Perumal (2023)	Investigating Storytelling Differences Between Western and Eastern Computer Animation <i>Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research (ICCM 2022)</i>	Qualitative comparative analysis of storytelling elements and narrative structures between Western (American) and Eastern (Japanese) computer animation	Identified that animated storytelling can adopt different narrative orientations, including individual-focused storylines with linear structures, as well as value-driven narratives that prioritise thematic coherence, collective experiences, and non-linear storytelling progression.	Provides a conceptual foundation for developing culturally grounded storytelling models; useful as a reference framework for Malaysian animation narrative development
Chitra Suparmaniam et al. (2023)	A Comparative Study Between Animation Movie of Hikayat Sang Kancil (Filem Negara Malaysia) And Animation Movie Pada Zaman Dahulu (Les' Copaque Production): Narrative Elements <i>Journal of Technical and Vocational Education (JTVE)</i>	Comparative qualitative study analysing narrative elements across two eras of Malaysian animation	Found that modern animation (<i>Pada Zaman Dahulu</i>) applies narrative elements more effectively than early animation (<i>Hikayat Sang Kancil</i>), especially in storytelling continuity and character engagement	Highlights evolution of narrative sophistication in Malaysian animation; useful for understanding historical-to-modern storytelling progression

4.3 Character Design and Emotional Engagement

The findings also highlight the significance of character design in fostering emotional engagement. Arshad and Kim (2020) empirically establish that character appearance and visual aesthetics significantly influence audience emotional responses and empathy. Their results underscore the role of character design as a narrative conduit rather than a purely aesthetic element. This resonates with P. Ramlee's legacy of character-driven storytelling, where emotional expression and relatability were central to audience connection. Accordingly, animation demonstrates a strong capacity to generate emotional resonance comparable to live-action performance through strategic character design.

Table 5 Summary of Character Design, Emotional Engagement, and Audience Empathy

Authors	Journal	Methodology	Results	Advantages
Rizuan Zainal & Mohd Asyiek Mat Desa (2025)	The Benefit of Using Emotion in 3D Animation Film: Pre-Production Stage <i>paperASIA, Vol. 41 (1b)</i>	Mixed-methods: document analysis and semi-structured interviews with 10 Malaysian animation practitioners	Emotional elements and relatability in pre-production significantly influence audience engagement; lack of emotional storytelling contributes to weak adult audience reception of Malaysian animation	Provides empirical industry-based evidence on the importance of emotion and relatability; offers practical insights for improving Malaysian animation quality and appeal
Mohd Rosli Bin Arshad & Hae-Yoon Kim (2020)	Exploring Visual Perception and Character Appearances in Malaysian Animated Film <i>CharactersAnimation Studies Journal (Korea)</i>	Quantitative empirical study using questionnaires; statistical analysis (One-Way ANOVA, Correlation tests) involving 104 Malaysian youth	Found that character visual appeal significantly influences emotional pleasantness and empathy; no significant difference across age and gender	Supplies empirical evidence linking character design aesthetics to audience emotion; strengthens animation research with measurable audience perception data

5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This systematic review aimed to explore how animated storytelling can serve as a medium to represent and preserve the film legacy of P. Ramlee amidst evolving media consumption and generational tastes. The results suggest that animation has significant potential as a culturally, narratively, and emotionally impactful medium for reimagining classic Malay cinema for modern audiences. Instead of substituting traditional films, animation enhances existing heritage forms by providing alternative ways to access and engage, especially for younger viewers.

The assessment emphasises how well animation conveys cultural narratives and ideals that are essential to P. Ramlee's movies. According to earlier research, Malaysian animation can incorporate social concerns, humour, moral values, and local identity in ways that are still relevant in contemporary settings. This implies that animation can serve as a modern continuation of P. Ramlee's cultural narrative, maintaining the spirit of his work while delivering it in ways that suit the viewing preferences of digital natives.

The results also demonstrate how important narrative structure and storytelling strategies are to the success of animated adaptations. According to the studied literature, animation has evolved into a narratively sophisticated medium that can convey meaningful character arcs, cohesive tales, and unambiguous messages. These characteristics are a reflection of P. Ramlee's films' structured narrative style, which frequently blended social message with amusement. Animated storytelling may preserve the complexity and intent of traditional cinematic storylines while adapting them to new mediums by

utilising robust narrative frameworks.

Additionally, the evaluation highlights the significance of emotional engagement and character creation. Empirical research indicates that relatable and visually expressive characters increase viewer empathy and emotional connection. This is especially pertinent to P. Ramlee's legacy because his movies focused on emotional expression to engage viewers and were heavily character-driven. Emotional narrative that appeals to all age groups is made possible by animation's creative versatility in character design and performance.

This systematic evaluation concludes by showing that animated storytelling is a viable and appropriate medium for honouring P. Ramlee's cinematic legacy. Animation can aid in bridging the generational divide in the appreciation of classic Malay cinema through emotionally compelling characters, structured storytelling techniques, and culturally grounded narratives. By demonstrating how digital creative techniques can preserve and reinterpret national film heritage in ways that remain meaningful, accessible, and relevant for future audiences, the study promotes cultural sustainability.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors acknowledge the Creative Motion Design programme, Faculty of Art & Design, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Puncak Alam, Selangor, for providing the research data. The author also would like to thank her parents for endless support in completing this journal. This research was conducted with the approval of the faculty Research Ethics Committee, REF {FSSR/AD234/12/2025 (EXM19)}.

FUNDING

No financial aid was received

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Rabiatul Asyikin Rosdiece is the first author of this article, and her supervisor, Nur Aniza Mohd Lazim, is the corresponding author. Sharkawi Che Din checks overall writing in this paper.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

No conflict of interests.

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