

Integrating drama into education: theoretical foundations and contemporary challenges

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to offer an in-depth overview of key theoretical principles that support the integration of drama techniques into language teaching. By establishing a strong theoretical framework, the literature review introduces key theories underpinning drama pedagogy, explores its integration within broader communicative methodologies, and contrasts it with traditional teaching approaches. In addition to the theoretical insights, we conducted a systematic review that provided empirical evidence to support our findings and inform our practical recommendations. Our main findings indicate that, compared to traditional methods, drama enhances student engagement, communication skills, and confidence while reducing language anxiety, making it a highly effective tool for language acquisition. However, challenges such as limited teacher knowledge, insufficient class time, and a lack of structured programs persist, underscoring the need for enhanced teacher training, better resources, and a more standardized approach to drama in education. The study also identifies practical recommendations for implementing drama effectively in language classrooms.

Keywords: drama-based learning, effects of drama, language acquisition, teacher training, EFL teaching

Introduction

Language teaching has, in the last 20 years, gradually transitioned from the traditional way of teaching to more interactive and student focused approach. This aspect is addressed by Kolb and Kolb (2006), where authors explained how the learning process adapted by moving from an approach where teacher is the centre of the class, and the only aim is to transfer knowledge to more active learning process where learners take a more central role. Authors further explain how teachers are increasingly adopting experiential learning approaches, because it provides an ideal learning environment that maximises achievement and enhances language acquisition. However, institutions often fail to provide adequate support and make necessary adjustments to their evaluation systems to accommodate experiential learning methods. The effectiveness of experiential learning may be compromised if faculty members are not motivated to invest in the development of such courses (Kolb & Kolb, 2006).

One type of experiential learning approach is drama-based learning. Through drama techniques, learners actively use new vocabulary and structures, enhancing confidence, pronunciation, fluency, and cultural awareness (Zafeiriadou, 2009; Maley & Duff, 2005; Schewe, 2013; Akar-Vural & Somers, 2011; Freeman et al., 2010). Angelianawati (2019) highlights drama's role in bridging theory and practice in language learning. Despite its documented benefits, drama remains under-researched in EFL teacher education. Lou et al. (2024) highlight the limited evidence on process drama's impact in such contexts. This study explores practical ways to integrate drama-based methods into EFL teacher training, aiming to improve curriculum design and teaching methodology.

Theoretical background

Historical context of drama in education: from performance to pedagogical innovation

Drama now goes beyond theatre and serves as a teaching tool that builds communication, creativity, and learner identity, engaging students emotionally and intellectually. This chapter critically re-examines

the development of theatre in education, emphasising how its underlying theories and methods address contemporary issues, especially in pre-service EFL teacher education, where theatre can promote reflective teaching methods, boost confidence, and lessen anxiety.

Courtney (1989) describes drama as a human-made process where imagination is activated through empathy and identification. Similarly, Boulton (2014) expands this notion by viewing drama as a form of literature that transcends the written word, coming to life, walking and talking before our eyes. In an educational context, Holden (1982) adds that drama involves any activity where learners represent either themselves or others, entering a world of "let us pretend."

In the early 1900s, drama was influenced by speech training, literature, and progressive education, with educators like Elsie Fogerty and Harriet Finlay-Johnson demonstrating its pedagogical value. Later, Winifred Ward's "Creative Dramatics" were created with an emphasis on student-driven performances. Peter Slade introduced child-centred drama for expression and therapy, while Rudolf Laban integrated drama with movement-based education (Bolton, 2007). In the mid-20th century, a distinction emerged: drama was participant-driven and experiential, while theatre was focused on audience-centred performance (Fleming, 2019; Way, 1967, in Zafeiridou, 2009).

Pioneers Dorothy Heathcote and Gavin Bolton revolutionised drama teaching. Heathcote used drama to explore new situations and introduced "living through drama", which redefined classroom dynamics. Bolton expanded this work with "Drama on Education", further legitimising its pedagogical role (Fleming, 2019). Heathcote also introduced the "teacher-in-role" method, where educators participated in role-play, challenging traditional teacher-student dynamics. Their "Mantle of the Expert" concept allowed students to act as experts, fostering critical thinking and problem-solving (Anderson, 2012). These innovations continue to shape performative language pedagogy (Schewe, 2013), also helping future teachers rehearse teaching in emotionally safe and imaginative contexts.

Theories and teaching methods supporting drama in language learning

Drama-based instruction is underpinned by a rich interplay of learning theories that foreground interaction, emotion, and embodied experience. Unlike traditional, form-focused methodologies, drama integrates social and physical dimensions of learning. The following section synthesises key theoretical frameworks supporting drama in language education.

Vygotsky's (1978, as cited in Baykal et al., 2019) social learning theory emphasises interaction in language development. Drama promotes collaboration and linguistic competence through role-play and improvisation, allowing learners to co-construct knowledge (Schewe, 2013). According to Vygotsky, learning is enhanced through support within the zone of what he calls proximal development, which is the gap between what learners are able to learn on their own and what they can accomplish with some assistance. Role-play, in this context, serves as a tool for advancing both cognitive and language abilities.

Krashen and Terrell's (1983) Natural Approach stresses meaningful communication and emotional involvement, which drama naturally encourages. Krashen's (1994) Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis supports the use of authentic contexts for language growth, while his Affective Filter Hypothesis (1982) explains how anxiety impedes learning. Drama helps lower this filter by creating a relaxed, supportive environment (Stern, 1980). Piazzoli (2011) affirms the transformative impact of these principles on language education.

Experiential learning (Kolb et al., 2001) links active practice with cognitive and emotional engagement. Dramatic activities promote reflection and reinforce language through experience (Mollaei & Rahnema, 2012). Gressler (2002) and Mockler (2002) further argue that drama counters passive learning through embodied participation.

The theory of embodied cognition (Glenberg, 2010) highlights how movement aids cognitive processing. Drama supports this by combining movement with language to help internalise structures (Heathcote, 1984). Lakoff and Johnson (1999) emphasise metaphorical reasoning in learning, while Wilson

(2002) and Dewey (1938) stress the sensorimotor basis of cognition. Similarly, Total Physical Response (TPR), developed by Asher (1977), links language learning with movement. Richards and Rogers (2001) describe TPR as a method that blends instruction with motor activity. TPR reduces stress and supports retention by activating both brain hemispheres, thereby improving engagement and memory (Savic, 2014; Nuraeni, 2019) which aligns with Krashen's affective principles.

These complementary theories are used in drama-based language instruction, and each one emphasises how well it promotes engagement, communication, and retention. Drama is a potent tool in language education because it offers an active, emotionally complex, and physically immersive approach that differs from traditional methods.

Traditional vs. drama-based language teaching approaches: a theoretical comparison

Language teaching has long been guided by tension between traditional and experimental methods. Traditional approaches were once focused on structure, repetition, and teacher centrality, whereas modern approaches, such as drama-based methods, have shifted towards interaction, emotional involvement, and learner independence. This comparative analysis critically examines the main differences between these approaches to teaching EFL, specifically in terms of their effects upon teaching ideology, classroom dynamics, learner motivation, and outcomes. By analysing theoretical foundations, teacher-learner roles, instructional techniques, and affective, social, and linguistic impacts, the analysis shows how drama pedagogy creates a more inclusive and participatory language learning.

Traditional methods in language education emphasise grammatical precision, memorisation, and teacher authority. These include:

- Grammar-Translation Method (GTM): Rooted in classical language instruction, GTM emphasises vocabulary lists, direct translation, and grammatical rules (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Communication is largely absent, as students seldom engage in authentic speech production.
- Audio-Lingual Method (ALM): Inspired by behaviourist psychology (Skinner, 1957), ALM uses repetition and habit formation through drills. Though effective in developing accuracy, it lacks depth in honest communication and creativity (Prator & Celce-Murcia, 1979).
- Direct Method: Emerging as a response to GTM, it emphasizes immediate use of language, without translation, focusing on oral skills (Stern, 1991). While more engaging, it still maintains teacher dominance and prescriptive materials.

These approaches often disregard learner autonomy and emotional engagement in favour of separating language components from relevant contexts (Wong, 2005; Batool et al., 2017).

However, drama-based approaches encompass experiential and constructivist theories. With the help of these methods, students can develop meaningful identities, solve practical problems, and use language intentionally. Their strength lies in how they operationalise these through classroom practices, such as *Teacher-in-Role*, developed by Heathcote (1984), and *Mantle of the Expert*, designed by Bolton and Heathcote (1995). For pre-service teachers, this immersive practice fosters confidence, empathy, and critical thinking skills that are crucial for professional readiness (Piazzoli, 2018).

Richards and Rodgers (2001) talk about how, drama extends the ideas of Communicative Language Teaching, with stressed meaningful interaction. Similarly, drama also draws from Task-Based Teaching, which centres on real-life tasks and projects (Ellis, 2003). Drama is extended by incorporating embodied and emotionally resonant activities, such as role-play and storytelling.

Traditional approaches, which perceive language acquisition as the development of habits, are based on behaviourist and structuralist theories. Students may become disengaged and their affective needs may be neglected if form is prioritised over fluency (Wong, 2005). Teacher-centred classrooms may discourage students' effort and hinder their spontaneous speech. Vygotsky's (1978) ZPD has inspired drama-based approaches, which employ scaffolding and teamwork to promote growth. Learning by doing

and reflecting is further supported by Kolb's experiential learning theory (Kolb et al., 2001). These frameworks support drama's emphasis on engagement, risk-taking, and long-term retention.

Traditional approaches often fail to address learners' emotional barriers. Krashen (1982) outlined how elevated anxiety hinder language learning, a concept he termed the Affective Filter Hypothesis. By providing a safe environment for experimentation, drama lowers this filter, which is especially advantageous for pre-service teachers (Bréauté, 2023; Ozmen, 2010). Moreover, drama activates embodied cognition, where movement and gesture facilitate deeper cognitive processing (Glenberg, 2010; Wilson, 2002). Students use physicality to reinforce meaning, making abstract concepts more tangible and memorable (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999).

The Mantle of the Expert technique, creatively redefines students as accountable "experts" who use role-based scenarios to solve real-world problems (Bolton & Heathcote, 1995). These kinds of experiences foster critical thinking, empathy, teamwork, and language proficiency.

Traditional teaching focuses on linguistic output, sometimes at the expense of broader communicative or pedagogical development. Drama, however, contributes to a holistic skill set: it cultivates empathy, collaboration, problem-solving, and classroom presence—skills essential for pre-service teachers. Dramatic performances improve verbal and nonverbal communication, as Piazzoli (2018) points out, and provide future teachers with a priceless opportunity to practise actual classroom dynamics.

Drama's versatility is another significant advantage. Drama integrates smoothly with various pedagogical approaches, including Task-Based Teaching, Content and Language Integrated Learning and Communicative Language Teaching too. It also accommodates differentiated learning styles—kinaesthetic, auditory, visual—making it inclusive and learner-centred.

This chapter has explored the contrasting foundations and outcomes of traditional and drama-based approaches to EFL teaching. The argument demonstrates how drama-based education offers a dynamic, student-centred method that improves the significance of language learning through affective and cognitive engagement. Drama fosters a participatory environment grounded in theory and real-life relevance. Its inclusion in language teacher education is essential for preparing reflective, confident professionals.

Table 1 summarises the key theoretical and practical distinctions between traditional and drama-based language teaching approaches discussed throughout this chapter. It provides a comparative summary of fundamental pedagogical components, including learning objectives, classroom procedures, teacher and student roles, and emotional engagement. By synthesising key points, the table provides a concise point of reference for comprehending the pedagogical shift in EFL education towards more interactive and holistic approaches.

Table 1. Traditional vs. drama-based language teaching approaches

Aspect	Traditional teaching methods	Drama-based teaching
Core philosophy	Transmission of knowledge from teacher to student.	Knowledge co-constructed through interaction and experience.
Role of teacher	Central authority and instructor.	Facilitator, co-participant, or "teacher-in-role" (Heathcote, 1984; Bolton, 1992).
Role of student	Passive receiver, focus on accuracy.	Active creator, focus on communication and creativity, co-creator (Vygotsky, 1978).
Learning focus	Grammar rules, vocabulary lists, translation.	Emotional engagement, social interaction, real-life contexts.
Primary activities	Drills, repetition, translation, dictation.	Role-play, improvisation, tableau, simulations, "Mantle of the Expert".
Language use	Often decontextualized and isolated.	Contextualized, embedded in narrative or interaction.

Classroom environment	Structured, rigid, sometimes anxiety-inducing.	Supportive, imaginative, encourages risk-taking.
Emotional engagement	Limited.	High—leverages empathy, identity, and affective involvement, reduces anxiety (Krashen, 1982; Piazzoli, 2011).
Outcome focus	Linguistic competence (accuracy, vocabulary).	Communicative competence (fluency, confidence, adaptability).
Anxiety levels	Often high due to fear of mistakes.	Lowered through collaborative and creative contexts.
Interaction type	Teacher-student, limited peer interaction.	Peer collaboration, improvisation (Schewe, 2013).
Cognitive involvement	Repetition, rote memory.	Problem solving, creativity (Kolb et al., 2001; Lakoff and Johnson, 1999).

Main aim and secondary aims

The purpose of this article is to present a thorough theoretical examination of the advantages of employing drama-based approaches in English language teaching. To achieve this aim, several research objectives were stated, which are as follows:

- To provide and contrast the core pedagogical foundations of traditional versus drama-based teaching methods.
- To synthesize recurring empirical findings.
- To identify common implementation challenges.
- To propose evidence-based recommendations for the sustained integration of drama in language education.

Methodology

This study employed a dual-method approach that combined theoretical inquiry with empirical analysis, to examine the role and impact of drama pedagogy in English language teaching. First, the fundamental theories and pedagogical principles of both traditional and drama-based approaches to language instruction were examined through a comparative analysis. This theoretical inquiry laid the groundwork for understanding the conceptual shift introduced by drama in educational settings. Second, a systematic review of twelve selected empirical studies was conducted. These studies were analysed to extract key information related to learning objectives, participant demographics, teacher preparation, applied drama techniques, research findings, and implementation challenges. Finally, the two strands— theoretical and empirical—were synthesised to develop practical recommendations aimed at enhancing teacher training, informing curriculum design, and supporting the effective integration of drama-based methods into EFL teacher education programs.

To locate relevant studies, we searched ERIC using keywords: 'implementing drama in education,' 'drama in language education,' and 'recommendations for successful implementation of drama.' This resulted in an initial 273 records. After applying the criteria for selecting the studies, which were:

- Peer-reviewed empirical research.
- Research centred on the use of drama in English Language Teaching (not performance arts courses).
- Participants: learners of any level (primary to tertiary), in-service teachers, general classroom contexts.
- Outcomes: cognitive, emotional, linguistic, or social learning outcomes.
- Studies since 2016 (last 10 years)

There were 42 studies left, which after first screening of titles and abstracts, 12 studies were selected for the review.

Coding and categorization of selected studies

- For the review we have developed a coding system to compare studies based on:
 - Participant demographics (age group, education level, subject area).
 - Drama methods used (e.g., role-play, improvisation, process drama, teacher-in-role, forum theatre).
 - Learning goals (language skills, empathy development, critical thinking, cultural awareness, emotional intelligence, etc.).
 - Teacher training and preparation involved.

Practical considerations and implementation challenges.

Systematic review of selected studies on drama techniques in EFL teacher education - results

This review examines how drama techniques influence classroom procedures and learner performance, focusing on the methods used, contexts, and implementation challenges. We present the summary of selected studies for the review, in the following Table 2.

Table 2. Selected studies for the review

Number of the study	Title, author, year of publication
Study 1	The Effect of Using Drama in English Language Learning among Young Learners: A Case Study of 6th Grade Female Pupils in Sakaka City (Alasmari & Alshae'el, 2020)
Study 2	Exploring Students' Perspectives on The Use of Drama Techniques in Efl Speaking Lessons (Dawoud et al., 2024)
Study 3	Enhancing English Language Skills through a Collaborative Drama Project (Mardiani & Hanifah, 2023)
Study 4	Drama-Based Approach in English Language Teaching (Bessadet, 2022)
Study 5	Using Drama in English Language Teaching: Primary and Secondary School Teachers' Perspectives and Practices (Ali & Kani, 2024)
Study 6	Creative Drama on Teacher Candidates' Speech Anxiety (Şahin & Şen, 2023)
Study 7	The Views of ELT Pre-Service Teachers on Using Drama in Teaching English and on Their Practices Involved in Drama Course (Baykal et al., 2019)
Study 8	The effect of creative drama on the creative self-efficacy of pre-service teachers (Eyüp, 2024)
Study 9	The Effects Of Creative Drama Activities On Developing English Speaking Skills (Göktürk et al., 2020)
Study 10	The Effect of Creative Drama on Student Success and Speaking Skill in Foreign Language Teaching (Culha, 2020)
Study 11	The Use of Project-based Learning Focusing on Drama to Promote Speaking Skills of EFL Learners (Sirisrimangkorn, 2018)
Study 12	Enhancing EFL Students' English Competency Through Drama: A Case Study in a Primary School in China (Yuanyuan, 2019)

Participant demographics

From the demographic data of participants across the twelve reviewed studies, several themes and patterns emerge. Firstly, pre-service teachers and school-aged learners are the two dominant groups studied. Pre-service teachers (Studies 3–8), usually in their early to mid-20s, reflect strong interest in drama's role in teacher development. School-aged learners (Studies 1, 2, 9–12) range from sixth to eleventh grade, with sample sizes varying from small groups (e.g., six students) to full classes (up to 45 students).

The studies span several countries, including Indonesia, Algeria, China, Palestine, and Saudi Arabia, with Turkey being the most frequently represented. The gender distribution was generally balanced, although a few studies involved female-only groups due to cultural or contextual factors (Studies 1 and 5). Some studies note participants' mixed socioeconomic backgrounds, including parental education and urban/rural location. Many lacked theatre experience, revealing drama's instructional potential.

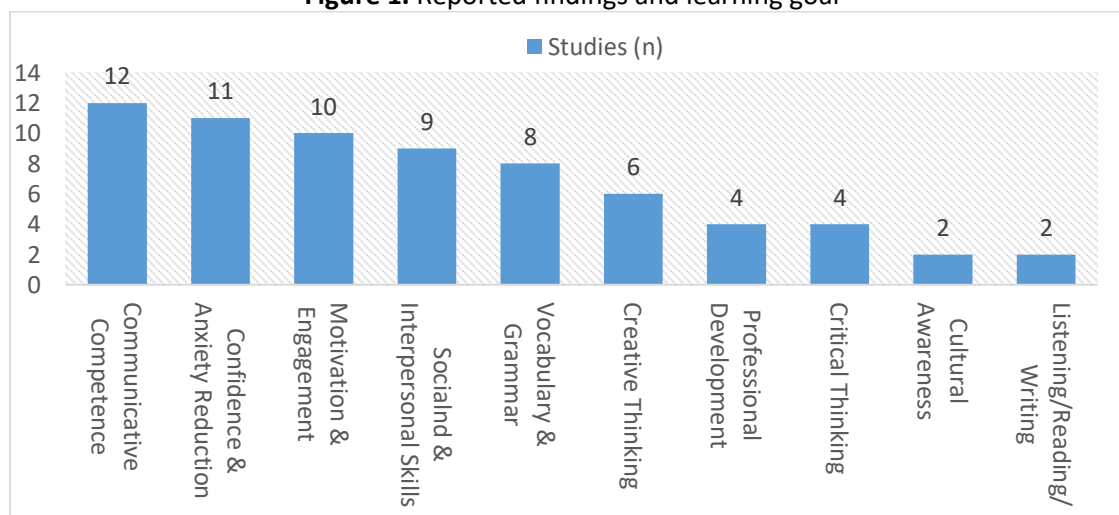
Drama methods used

Based on the analysis of 12 studies, several recurring drama methods emerge. Role-play and improvisation (each in 6 studies) were the most common, followed by scripted plays (3 studies). Creative drama workshops (3 studies) offered comprehensive activities like warm-ups, animations, and themed performances. There was a noticeable trend towards combining planning (script creation and analysis) with impromptu performance (games, pantomime, and improvisation), indicating a balance between methodical and imaginative approaches.

Overall, role-playing and improvisation dominate due to their flexibility and emphasis on spontaneous language use. The recurrence of script work—whether from canonical texts like *Riders to the Sea* or student-created material—indicates the importance of textual engagement for deeper linguistic and cultural learning. Combining structured preparation with improvisational freedom appears most effective for enhancing communication, teamwork, and confidence.

Learning goals and key findings

Figure 1. Reported findings and learning goal



Across the twelve studies reviewed (see Figure 1), improving oral language skills emerged as the most consistent goal and outcome (12/12). Drama-based techniques enhanced learners' fluency, accuracy,

pronunciation, and vocabulary (Studies 1, 3, 6, 10), thereby fostering spontaneous and authentic communication. Learners developed grammatical accuracy, creative self-expression, and confidence in dynamic dialogues. In drama-integrated classrooms, students often outperform their peers in traditional settings (Studies 1, 3, 10), with notable gains in speaking and a reduction in speech anxiety, especially in public contexts (Studies 6, 10).

Affective benefits were also prominent, with 11 studies (11/12) reporting increased motivation, confidence, and reduced anxiety and fear of mistakes (Studies 2, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10). Drama created safe, supportive environments that encouraged participation, especially among shy or anxious individuals, shifting them from passive to active roles (Studies 4, 7, 9).

Ten studies (10/12) highlighted drama as a key factor in increasing learners' motivation and engagement, as well as fostering language and emotional growth. Nine studies (9/12) emphasised social and interpersonal skill development, including collaboration, empathy and peer feedback (Studies 3, 5, 8, 11). Activities such as improvisation, project-based learning, and role-playing supported effective group work and communication. Six studies (6/12) noted the growth of creative thinking and expression through problem-solving and imaginative tasks (Studies 5, 7, 11).

For pre-service teachers, four studies (4/12) reported professional development outcomes, including enhanced reflective practice, classroom presence, and creative self-efficacy (Studies 4, 8, 9). Another four studies (4/12) addressed cognitive development, noting improved metacognitive awareness, learner autonomy, and critical thinking (Studies 4, 6). Eight studies (8/12) showed better vocabulary and grammar retention through contextualised and meaningful input (Studies 2, 5, 7, 10).

Less commonly, drama was credited with fostering cultural and aesthetic awareness (2/12) and enhancing reading, writing, and listening comprehension in creative contexts (2/12) (Studies 2, 12).

Across the twelve studies, a recurring tension emerged between structured drama training and more informal, experiential approaches. Some studies emphasised formal preparation—such as courses, expert-led workshops, or institutional integration (Studies 2, 7, 8, 9, 12)—while others relied on self-directed, improvisational teaching methods (Studies 1, 3, 4, 6). Despite varying levels of formal training, nearly all studies portrayed the teacher not as a traditional authority figure, but as a facilitator, reflecting a shift toward learner-centred pedagogy.

Even without formal training, many teachers engaged in reflective preparation, adapting materials and responding to group dynamics. Study 5, on the other hand, found gaps in pedagogical knowledge, particularly in classroom management and theoretical foundations. This indicates that more comprehensive professional development is necessary.

All studies showed a shift from direct instruction to a more supportive, facilitative teaching role. Reflective lesson planning was the subject of eight studies that emphasised the importance of carefully adapting activities and scripts to students' varying skill levels. Six studies included formal drama training, although access to it remains restricted. According to three studies, teachers desire more guidance in both theoretical and practical applications, indicating a significant need for professional development. Collaboration and support were mentioned less frequently (in two studies), but they emphasised the value of interdisciplinary teamwork and expert input.

Implementation challenges

The review of selected studies reveals recurring challenges that affect the successful use of drama in education. These include affective barriers, institutional and logistical limitations, classroom management, linguistic and cognitive difficulties, and socio-cultural constraints.

Emotional resistance was a standard issue across many studies. Students often felt anxious, embarrassed, or self-conscious during performances, improvisations, or public speaking (Studies 1, 3, 4, 6, 10, 11, 12). Fear of peer judgment reduced participation and fluency. Some studies (e.g., Study 6) viewed these emotional barriers as both obstacles and target areas for drama to address. Without proper

support, students—especially those who were shy or lacked confidence—often resisted drama activities early on (Studies 5, 8, 9).

Many studies noted that strict curricula and short class periods limited the time available for drama activities (Studies 3, 5, 7, 10). A lack of training and limited resources like props or space also restricted creative possibilities (Studies 5, 7, 8, 9).

Several studies (Studies 1, 5, 7) noted difficulties maintaining order during drama activities, especially in large or crowded classrooms. Group tasks were affected by dominance, unequal participation, and lack of collaboration (Studies 8, 9).

Drama demands expressive and spontaneous language use, which poses challenges in EFL contexts. Students with shared L1 backgrounds (e.g., Arabic or Sundanese) struggled with pronunciation, code-switching, and limited vocabulary (Studies 1, 3). Memorising English scripts was especially hard for low-proficiency learners, increasing anxiety and reducing fluency (Studies 3, 4).

In some settings, students were unfamiliar with theatre or saw drama as inappropriate for formal learning, particularly in more conservative cultures (Studies 4, 7). Institutional resistance—such as rigid school policies or sceptical teacher attitudes—also hindered drama integration.

Studies 2 and 6 showed that careful planning, clear instructions, and relevant content helped drama activities be more effective and go with greater ease. Implementing drama in EFL education is complex and multifaceted process. While it offers powerful pedagogical benefits, success depends on teacher training, institutional support, curriculum flexibility, and attention to students' emotional and language needs. Drama's full educational potential can be realised by addressing the most prevalent issues, which include classroom dynamics, time constraints, and affective barriers, through inclusive practices and adaptive planning.

Discussion

This section synthesises the theoretical and empirical findings of the study, structured around its four main aims. The first aim—providing a theoretical overview of drama-based language teaching—was addressed in the literature review, where core pedagogical principles supporting drama were contrasted with traditional approaches and summarised in a comparative table. The contrast illustrated how traditional methods, though effective in fields such as memorisation and accuracy, have been found to neglect communication, limit creativity, and affective needs, turning learners into passive individuals who then become anxious (Wong, 2005). Drama-based methods, on the other hand, have been found to enhance learner participation as noted by Mockler (2002) and provide space for natural interaction and emotional engagement. Anxiety among learners is minimised while problem-solving skills and fluency are improved through such methods. It enables educators to act as facilitators, creating a safe environment that fosters motivation and engagement. For pre-service teachers, it can be an effective means of improving their pedagogical skills, flexibility, and further increasing their empathy, adopting a more practice-oriented and comprehensive approach than traditional approaches.

Addressing the second aim—synthesising recurring empirical findings—the review found consistent empirical evidence that drama supports both psychological and professional growth of EFL teacher trainees. All twelve studies found that drama helped people become more self-aware, confident, and emotionally mature, aligning seamlessly with the findings of Piazzoli (2018) and Bréauté (2023). The lowering of the affective filter is evident in the explicit decrease in anxiety and increase in self-confidence of learners, with 11 out of 12 studies showing this effect — a notable convergence, as traditional methods are often associated with an inability to reduce this barrier. Students in drama contexts, even those initially shy or prejudiced against English, demonstrated radical shifts in their willingness to communicate and express themselves (Culha, 2020; Sirisrimangkorn, 2018). Improved oral proficiency, confidence, and motivation (Studies 1, 2, 10, 11) are also linked with teacher competence in carrying out drama activities.

Nevertheless, more broadly, it is involved in teacher training in activity design, scaffolding, and analysis of practical skills, such as reflection, peer review, and performance assessment criteria (Chen et al., 2020). Increased creative self-efficacy among pre-service teachers (Studies 8 and 9) further attests to drama's ability to foster the flexible and creative thinking required in today's evolving pedagogy. Discomfort may exist at first; however, drama remains a valuable tool to help students get beyond such limitations. The studies show that it is the process of drama itself that creates the confidence it demands at the beginning, provided that students are guided through respectful scaffolding and a secure, supportive space.

Furthermore, the theoretical emphasis on contextualised language use and communication-focused activities is empirically confirmed by the universal targeting of speaking and communicative skills in all 12 studies. Drama methods, such as role-play and improvisation, which hold prominence as core activities in the theoretical framework, consequently, have been used most in practice, resulting in measurable progress in fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, and vocabulary (e.g., Göktürk et al., 2020; Sirisrimangkorn, 2018). The embodied cognition aspect, where movement and gesture facilitate deeper processing, is echoed in students' reported ability to express thoughts and feelings more effectively with "movements and mimics" (Culha, 2020) and the emphasis on integrating verbal and nonverbal communication (Sirisrimangkorn, 2018).

The shift in the teacher's role from central authority to facilitator or co-participant—a defining characteristic of drama-based learning—is consistently demonstrated across all 12 reviewed studies. This change aligns with theoretical frameworks emphasising how drama allows teachers to become facilitators, guiding interaction, supporting risk-taking, and sharing power with learners. Our findings further echo Gautam and Agarwal's (2023) argument that teachers as facilitators do not simply transmit knowledge but instead create the conditions for exploration, dialogue, and learner autonomy, which are skills that are indispensable for the development of confident and communicative future teachers. Although this approach requires teachers an extensive amount of preparation and high adaptation skills, it has been proven to be very important in creating a collaborative environment and autonomy, which traditional methods often disregard. Although the precise method of "Mantle of the Expert" was not mentioned in any of the studies, the concept was implicit in project-based designs (Sirisrimangkorn, 2018), where teacher trainees took on roles of experts during acting out specific scenarios, thereby developing not only language but also critical thinking, empathy, and teamwork.

The third objective of the study was to identify recurring issues that arise when incorporating drama into lessons. The study found several affective barriers that learners encountered, including anxiety and embarrassment, as well as their low confidence levels. These emotional barriers occurred largely with shy learners as well as those with limited English language proficiency, which ultimately resulted in less engagement from them. These barriers of initial reluctance were also observed in studies conducted by Atas (2015) and Balgos (2020); however, as the drama workshops progressed, their anxieties slowly diminished because activities were delivered in an appropriate, non-threatening manner and supported by frequent formative feedback. Regardless of the activity, classroom management issues emerged repeatedly (time constraints, small classroom space and maintaining discipline), and learners also encountered linguistic elements blocking their ability to use or sustain fluency (limited vocabulary, difficulties with pronunciation, or memory challenges). Logistical limitations (rigidity in curriculum and lack of resources) were another recurring issue (Culha, 2020) and demonstrated the need for structural support for drama to work effectively as a sustained pedagogical practice.

The fourth aim involved proposing actionable recommendations based on the raised issues of implementing drama. For drama to be embedded meaningfully in teacher education, institutional support is essential. Despite increasing evidence of the value of drama, it still remains underutilised, perhaps due to restrictive curriculum, limited staff training, and a lack of willingness from learners – these concerns are also raised by McCarthy and O'Keeffe (2004) and Podlozny (2000). To look beyond simply providing only a few drama lessons, drama pedagogy needs fuller and stronger support from institutions in terms

of redesigning curriculum and allocating resources. Language teaching institutions, particularly those training pre-service teachers, should embed drama into their core curricula—not as an optional or extracurricular add-on, but as a foundational element of teacher education. Nguyen (2023) found that the teacher's limited knowledge of drama techniques affected the range of activities he used, with the role-play being the predominant approach. This confirms the necessity for designing a comprehensive, highly detailed drama-based program that assists teachers in using drama for instructional purposes (Podlozny, 2000; Piazzoli & Kennedy, 2014). Professional development programs should include drama-based micro-teaching (Gürses et al., 2005), which bridges theory and practice, thereby building teacher confidence. Ongoing reflective practice is essential for transforming theoretical insights into practical classroom strategies (Hahl & Keinanen, 2021; Ekşi, 2012; Hismanoğlu, 2012).

Supportive classroom environments are key. Teachers should acknowledge and proactively address students' initial anxieties by creating highly supportive, non-judgmental environments. This aspect was supported by Reed and Seong (2013), who conducted a drama-based English course in Korea. After engaging in bonding games and structured warm-ups, a psychologically safe atmosphere was created in the classroom, allowing students to overcome shyness and communicate more freely. According to Winston (2012), when implementing drama in their lessons, teachers should be skilful in matching projects to students' interests, be playful in their approach, appreciate the role of physicality and understand its interactive nature and ability to foster emotional engagement. Boudreault (2010) emphasises that activities should be planned strategically to grow in intensity as participation increases so that learners can gradually feel comfortable taking part in them. These steps and successful implementation programs should be shared with teacher trainees and in-service teachers as part of courses and workshops led by experts.

From the reviewed studies, several methodological limitations became apparent. Future research should investigate the long-term effects of drama on teacher identity and learner outcomes, through well-designed longitudinal studies. Another promising direction is the exploration of culture in drama-based pedagogy. By taking on roles from diverse cultural contexts, learners can engage with cultural nuances in a dynamic and embodied way, thereby deepening both their linguistic competence and cultural understanding.

Through the deliberate and systematic adoption of drama-based approaches, EFL teaching can move beyond rote learning, shaping a new generation of confident, communicative, and holistic language learners and, most importantly, innovative and effective teachers armed with appropriate pedagogical tools.

Conclusion

This study has shown that drama-based pedagogy is not merely a methodological option standing in opposition to traditional language teaching, but rather one that transforms the entire dynamic of the classroom, the role of teachers, and student development. The theoretical comparison showed that, in contrast to the opposed transmission-focused nature of conventional methods, drama draws on experiential, social, and embodied learning theories to create a participatory and emotionally engaging environment. These theoretical perspectives were reinforced by the systematic review, which showed consistent gains in oral proficiency, motivation, confidence and collaborative skills across a range of learner groups. Because of the nature of teaching and its relationship to drama-based pedagogy, pre-service teachers benefit most from the findings.

Although drama has proved to be a positive tool in teaching, much is still required for practical integration into the everyday curriculum. Some limiting factors in the consistent use of drama in education include teachers' lack of knowledge, time constraints and difficulties in classroom management. Drama must be viewed as a fundamental pedagogical practice integrated into teacher education programs rather than as an adjunct if these obstacles are to be removed. This will require a sustained professional

development program, a restructuring of the curriculum, and stronger institutional support so that future educators can employ drama with confidence in their classrooms. This paper demonstrates the didactic value of drama, which can effectively prepare reflective, empathetic and communicative educators who can meet the current demands of language education by tying together theoretical underpinnings, empirical data, and practical suggestions.

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