

Research Article:

Teaching EFL/ESL through Educational Drama: Trends and Effectiveness: A Systematic Review

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ABSTRACT

The main goal of this study is to examine the trends and significant findings regarding educational drama in teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms. This study analysed educational drama techniques literature in English language teaching published in international databases, Web of Science, EBSCO and Science Direct from 2012 to 2022. A bibliometric systematic review was conducted, yielding a total of 44 papers. Then, the authors, journals of publishing and language skills were recognised. An inductive content analysis distinguished two main research themes: linguistic and non-linguistic skills. The findings suggest that educational drama techniques should be adopted and adapted to enhance and integrate the four linguistic skills; speaking, listening, reading and writing. Furthermore, educational drama techniques have been proven to boost non-linguistic skills (social, emotional, motivation and learner autonomy). However, the undeniable benefits of drama in the educational process, both generally and in the fields of EFL and ESL, are still limited to a few countries where authors have experimented with its merits and drawbacks. Nevertheless, it is expected to spread worldwide in the coming years, increasing its reach and impact.

Keywords: Educational drama, ESL/EFL teaching, linguistic skills, non-linguistic skills, systematic review

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INTRODUCTION

English has become the predominant international language, so the pressure to improve English language education (ELE) has constantly risen. Consequently, the nature of ELE has radically evolved during the past decade. There are so many changes in how English is taught and learned and various unique approaches have appeared worldwide. Generally speaking, students must acquire all linguistic skills to communicate in English. However, English learners still have low achievements in the four language skills (Fong et al., 2018; Sah & Li, 2018). English researchers have suggested various methods to help teachers deal with the English language learning process and related problems (Hall, 2017; McDonough & McDonough, 2014). Most of these methods surpass learners' roles in the class to the teacher and place them at the centre where they become active learners. Educational drama or drama in education is one of these methods. Among all other types, drama can serve as a more efficient means for teachers to cultivate students' receptive and productive skills, particularly in communication. Drama offers a genuine platform for naturally using language in real-life scenarios in a fantasy world for students, enhancing problem-solving, communication and vocabulary. This method fosters a secure, interactive world, enhancing students' enthusiasm for language learning, focusing on reciprocal, synchronised and unpredictable interactions (Kosma, 2021a; Beatty, 2015). In addition to its ability to establish a conducive environment where both the teacher and the students feel confident that they will derive pleasure and gain value from engaging in theatrical activities (Kosma, 2021b). Drama in language teaching significantly changes the teacher-student relationship. It allows teachers to lead and counsel activities, empowering learners to use the target language without fear of authority or mistakes (Celik, 2019). Kosma (2021a) suggested that drama as a replacement for traditional methods that repeat grammatical structures and mechanical vocabulary drilling exercises.

Educational drama has taken place in the English language teaching (ELT) area and has become one of the most crucial topic in the last 10 years. This is because it offers structured collection of circumstances closely resembling real life and creates more responsible learners for shaping their learning (Fong et al., 2018). In other words, students who converse in language classrooms are on their way to gaining real-world expertise.

According to Güven and Adıgüzel (2015), educational drama, in the most general sense, is any type of activity that contains action. By considering this definition, drama can achieve many linguistic and non-linguistic objectives, like social and emotional ones. Educational drama in EFL/ESL education is a combination of procedures that coordinate students' role-related activities in carefully designed situations, encouraging linguistic skills and the growth of the learners' overall personalities (Shraiber & Yaroslavova, 2016). Children break free from the constraints of the actual world because they are allowed to play out as another person or object, and they create scenarios and gestures appropriate for their roles (Alzoun et al., 2017).

In literature, drama in education has historically been described in terms like dramatic activity, developmental drama, creative dramatics, educational drama, the mantle of the expert and process drama (Dawoud et al., 2020). In the 1900s, drama was, of course, the act of putting on plays and performances. Later, in the 1960s, drama appeared as a way of working

to help young people learn. In the 20th century, the difference between drama and theatre was clearly set (Burst Drama, 2020). Meanwhile, Dorothy Heathcote founded the mantle of expert approach, which uses acting in a role to explore imaginary contexts. Process drama immerses participants in an interactive and collective exploration of a theme or situation. It involves roleplaying within an imagined context, often without a predetermined script, to encourage experiential learning (Burst Drama, 2020). Roleplay, mime, drama games, improvisation, simulation, frozen image creation, script-writing, process drama and mantle of expert are some of the drama techniques employed in the educational system.

The literature research demonstrates the use of drama in the classroom has become a hot topic in teaching English (Altweissi, 2022; Chang & Jing, 2022; Aryn, 2021; Masoumi-Moghaddam, 2018). Educational drama opponents argue that it can replace outdated traditional exercises, which repeat grammatical structures and mechanical vocabulary drilling activities and deal with the learning process and related problems (Kosma, 2021b). They believe there is an overlap between drama and contemporary education among the objectives. Both aim to develop students' critical thinking, social growth and communication skills (McCaslin, 2006, as cited in Güler & Kandemir, 2015). Additionally, Robinson (2015, as cited in Çayır & Yolcu, 2021) highlighted the value of holistic development, which involves both emotional and cognitive traits, and highlighted several competencies essential for the present and future generations. These skills include developing one's curiosity, asking questions, creativity, generating and applying new ideas, analysing data and opinions, building logical arguments, effectively expressing oneself, cooperating with others, being an effective citizen, developing empathy, becoming aware of one's emotions and finding one's own equilibrium and harmony. Robinson claims that techniques like drama shape learners' thoughts, emotions and perceptions of the world.

Despite this growing interest in educational drama techniques, it lacks thorough research on their efficacy in teaching foreign and second languages (Ulubey, 2018). Most drama implementation was used to instruct native English speakers, e.g., the first and persistent implementation of drama in education by the remarkable drama teacher, the British Dorothy Heathcote, was in the U.K. and the U.S.

English-language educational drama is critical for assisting field teachers, students, and stakeholders in improving academic quality and sustainability. Drama can be implemented to instruct specific speaking components like fluency, grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation individually or together. Throughout the learning process, cognitive and emotional processes are continually interacting. The significance of the current study lies in the potential for future research and for academics to gain new insights from a systematic evaluation of the findings produced by earlier studies reported in the literature. Finally, a general analysis of the literature revealed a lack of studies on the benefits of drama techniques in classrooms teaching foreign and second languages. In other words, only 44 articles introduced drama as an instructional medium, neither subject nor theatre. As a result, answers to the following research questions were requested for the study's purposes:

Q1: In the previous 10 years (2012–2022), what are the trends of educational drama in EFL/ESL instruction in the scientific community? In other words, what journals have written about this topic, who are the leading authors and from what

organisation/country, whose publications have had the most citations, and what are the research lines?

It is essential to make precise recommendations for future research in this field, looking at the most current findings (from 2012 to 2022) and their advice for study continuation. As a result, a new question was developed.

Q2: What are the recent linguistic and non-linguistic skills findings from the included literature review?

The reason behind identifying skills investigated in classrooms and the significant results is to highlight these techniques' value for the interested community. And help policymakers, stakeholders, teachers, universities, and students to step forward in improving the EFL and ESL practices and outcomes. The study's findings on these questions allow comprehension of the adjustments needed in an international EFL/ESL learning and teaching community regarding drama.

METHOD

A systematic review approach was utilised in this study, which reviews the literature based on a straightforward research question that identifies current studies that should be considered using systematic procedures (Uman, 2011). According to Systematic Reviews (2021), any data can be used in a systematic review, whether qualitative or quantitative, but should be strategically chosen based on the research purpose.

The procedure used to conduct a systematic review differs significantly from a literature review. The former gets things going carefully with the search for the articles to be examined using a specific path and allocated databases (Kowalczyk & Truluck, 2013). However, literature reviews are typically less thorough, and only a few databases are used to get the articles (Robinson & Lowe, 2015). The researchers followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews (PRISMA) statement's guidelines (Moher et al., 2009). Figure 1 displays the PRISMA selection diagram.

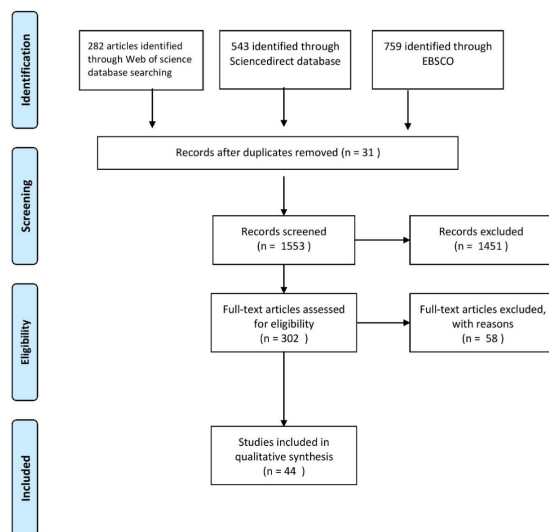


Figure 1. The PRISMA selection diagram

Data Collection

In addition to the Science Direct database and EBSCO, the Web of Science database, from which bibliometric data was electronically imported. This selection is because these platforms are the most trusted publishers in the field of social sciences. The following criteria were used to find articles: published between 2012 and 2022, written in English, used educational drama techniques as a medium in the English teaching and learning process, and designated as articles. In the current article, researchers include any piece that operates one of these techniques under the central umbrella, an educational drama mentioned above. On the contrary, other publications in other languages and other forms except articles were excluded. Also, pieces that introduced drama as films, movies, academic subjects, theatre, and therapy were excluded. These criteria refined the eligible articles.

An exploratory examination of papers on the study’s pertinent topic published between 2012 and 2022 yielded the chosen keywords. The search queries were (“English Language”, Education OR Educate OR Teaching OR Teach OR Learning OR Learn), and (Drama OR “Educational drama” OR Imagination OR “role play” OR “story telling”).

Category Identification and Data Analysis

The researchers used a content analysis based on a denomination system building to define the study line of each article (Denzin et al., 2023). First, all articles must be written only in the English language. Then, they each offered a category classification system for all articles. The categories were determined using an inductive strategy involving abstract or comprehensive examination of the text in case of doubt. The researchers’ various methods

were integrated, and the findings were debated to validate the category definition until an agreement on the criteria for picking each group was formed. They agreed that each item could only be assigned to one of the categories to adhere to the exclusivity criteria. The research line of articles was categorised by the primary dependent variable in situations when a paper includes many topics. Finally, two primary groups were established based on these parameters.

The findings of these study questions are vital for comprehending the adjustments needed in an international EFL/ESL learning and teaching community. Since English is a significant global language, EFL/ ESL education must adapt to worldwide requirements and expectations. The first category is the linguistic skills that focus on vocabulary, speaking, writing and reading. The second includes emotional and social skills and learners' autonomy and motivation under non-linguistic skills.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After applying the analytic criteria, 44 articles were selected as a final sample. The first three studies were published in 2012, and the bibliometric analysis covered 2012 to 2022. In addition, according to the findings, 43 studies were empirical. At the same time, one was theoretical, which might be related to the motivation to carefully evaluate the effect of several drama techniques on student skills. The study revealed that since 2012, the number of articles discussing various drama techniques in EFL and ESL has rapidly increased. The total of 11 articles were published in the first period (2012–2014) (see Table 1). The drama was a hot topic in the second period (2015–2017), with 15 articles published; the third period (2018–2020) witnessed the publication of 13 articles. Contrary to the previous periods, the last one includes two years, not three. As a result, the number of articles published during this period was expected to be less than the earlier periods, including three years. So, the number reduced to five in the last two years (2021–2022).

Table 1. Change of published articles by year and journal

Journal	2012–2014	2015–2017	2018–2020	2021–2022	Total
The Language Learning Journal			1		1
ELT Journal	1				1
Creative Approaches to Research	1				1
Changing English		1			1
The English Journal		1			1
Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences	2	1			3
The Reading Teacher	1		1		2

(Continued on next page)

Table 1. (Continued)

Journal	2012–2014	2015–2017	2018–2020	2021–2022	Total
International Journal of Humanities and Arts Computing	1				1
Australasian Journal of Early Childhood		1			1
Teachers College Record		1			1
Reading Research Quarterly		1			1
Arab World English Journal		1	2	1	4
Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance	1	1			2
Bilingual Research Journal	1				1
RELC Journal	1		1		2
Educational Action Research		1			1
Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences	1	1			2
Journal of Language and Education			1		1
Pertanika Journals Social Sciences and Humanities			1		1
Revista Publicando			1		1
TESOL Quarterly		1			1
English Teaching: Practice and Critique		1			1
Iranian Journal of Language Teaching Research		1			1
Language Teaching Research			1	1	2
The Australian Journal of Language and Literacy				1	1
TESL Canada Journal			1		1
EURASIA Journal of Mathematics Science and Technology Education		1			1

(Continued on next page)

Table 1. (Continued)

Journal	2012–2014	2015–2017	2018–2020	2021–2022	Total
Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies			1		1
International Journal of Educational Methodology			1		1
Pan-Pacific Association of Applied Linguistics	1				1
The Asia-Pacific Education Researcher				1	1
Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching			1		1
Novitas-ROYAL (Research on Youth and Language)		1			1
E-mentor				1	1
Total					44

Generally, the acceptance of these techniques and some of their benefits might be responsible for the increasing research in the drama field in the last decade. Another reason might be attributed to the rising interest in the subject, especially in the second period, which expected it to become more popular and spread worldwide, as shown in Table 2. More detailed data is introduced in Figure 2. It is worth mentioning that some countries like Saudi Arabia, Russia, Canada, the UK, Ecuador, Norway, Northern Cyprus, Iran, Jordan and Algeria started searching for drama techniques in EFL/ESL fields just in the previous five years. As a result, they are expected to spread to new countries in the coming years.

Table 2. Author’s countries and affiliation

Country	Author’s name (year)	Affiliation	Number
The US	Greenfader & Brouillette (2017; 2013)	University of Irvine	2
	Greenfader et al. (2015)	University of Irvine	1
	Haag (2018)	Texas Woman’s University	1
	Talhelm (2015)	National Council of Teachers of English	1
	Anderson & Loughlin (2014)	American University and University of Maryland	1
	Li et al. (2015)	California State University, Long Beach Unified School District and Los Angeles School District	1
	Al-Gahtani & Roever (2013)	Oxford University	1

(Continued on next page)

Table 2. (Continued)

Country	Author's name (year)	Affiliation	Number
Turkiye	Hismanoglu & Çolak (2019)	Uşak University	1
	Sağlamel & Kayaoğlu (2013)	Karadeniz Technical University	1
	Atas (2015)	Kozan Sis Technical and Vocational Anatolian High School, Adana	1
	Doğan & Cephe (2018)	Gazi University	1
	Dundar (2013)	Akdeniz University	1
Malaysia	Fong et al. (2018)	Universiti Teknologi PETRONAS	1
	Shima et al. (2012)	Universiti Teknologi MARA	1
	Kalidas (2014)	Taylor's University	1
	Nordin et al. (2012)	Universiti Teknologi Malaysia	1
Australia	Doecke (2015)	Deakin University	1
	Dutton & Rushton (2022)	Macquarie University and University of Sydney	1
	Stinson (2015)	Griffith University	1
	Wongsa & Son (2022)	University of Southern Queensland	1
Saudi Arabia	Eissa (2019)	University, Arar	1
	Alam & Al-Hawamdeh (2022)	Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University	1
	Keezhatta (2020)	Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University	1
Russia	Baranovskaya & Shaforostova (2018)	National Research University Higher School of Economics	1
	Gabitova et al. (2018)	Kazan Federal University, L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University	1
Canada	Lee et al. (2020)	University of Alberta	1
	Galante & Thomson (2017)	University of Toronto and Brock University	1
United Kingdom	Bora (2021)	University of Essex	1
	Kalogirou et al. (2019)	Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Cardiff Metropolitan University and Université Côte d'Azur	1
Taiwan	Lei & Huang (2012)	-	2
	Lee & Liu (2022)	University of Science and Technology	1

(Continued on next page)

Table 2. (Continued)

Country	Author's name (year)	Affiliation	Number
China	DeCoursey & Trent (2016)	University of Hong Kong	1
Japan	Araki-Metcalf (2012)	-	1
Ecuador	Castro & Villafuerte (2019)	Universidad Laica Eloy Alfaro de Manabi	1
Finland	Toivanen et al. (2015)	University of Helsinki	1
Norway	Zondag (2021)	Nord University	1
South Africa	O'Neill et al. (2016)	Tshwane University of Technology	1
Singapore	Wong (2014)	Victoria School	1
Northern Cyprus	Dimililer et al. (2017)	Near East University and Cyprus Science University	1
Iran	Abolfazli Khonbi & Sadeghi (2017)	Kosar University of Bojnord and Urmia University	1
Jordan	Alzboun et al. (2017)	Yarmouk University	1
Algeria	Bessadet (2022)	University of Saida Dr. Moulay Tahar	1
Korea	Reed & Seong (2013)	Eulji University	1
Total			44

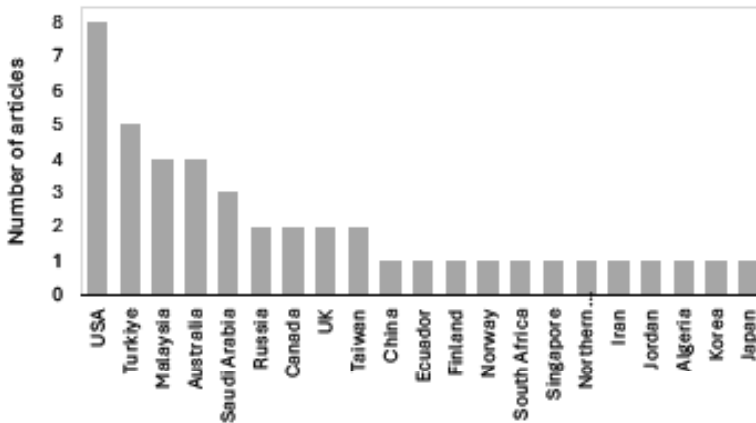


Figure 2. Published articles by year

In the analysed articles, the most common journals are consistently identified as the principal suppliers of research publications on this issue in the results (Arab World Journal, four articles, two authors are from Saudi Arabia, one from Pakistan and one from Turkey). Then, Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences ranks second with three pieces of research. This may be attributed to the journals’ interests and scopes.

The scientific outputs of the authors, as well as their affiliations and countries, are listed in Table 2. Two of the 44 authors who worked on this topic are engaged in three articles from the U.S. It is also worth noting that 18% of the U.S. scholars rank first in studying drama techniques in EFL/ESL fields. In comparison, approximately 11% of the authors in the second place are Turkish, as shown in Figure 3. Malaysian and Australian researchers occupy the third place with 9% of the included articles. Saudi Arabia is the only Arab country that has published 7% with three pieces of research about drama techniques. This difference among countries may be attributed to the flexibility of the educational systems in some countries, where teachers can create syllabi regarding the curriculum goal (Rosiek & Clandinin, 2019). On the contrary, in some countries, teachers are blindly subjected to a highly centralised educational system where their role is limited to following the EFL/ESL syllabus in the allocated time set by the educational ministries (Al-Kathiri, 2016). The heavy syllabusi prevent teachers from applying new educational techniques in their classrooms. Furthermore, some English teachers may see educational drama as an effective technique to enhance students' confidence to communicate in English without fear of being laughed at from other classmates since it promotes a less-threaten and interactive environment (Wongsa & Son, 2022).

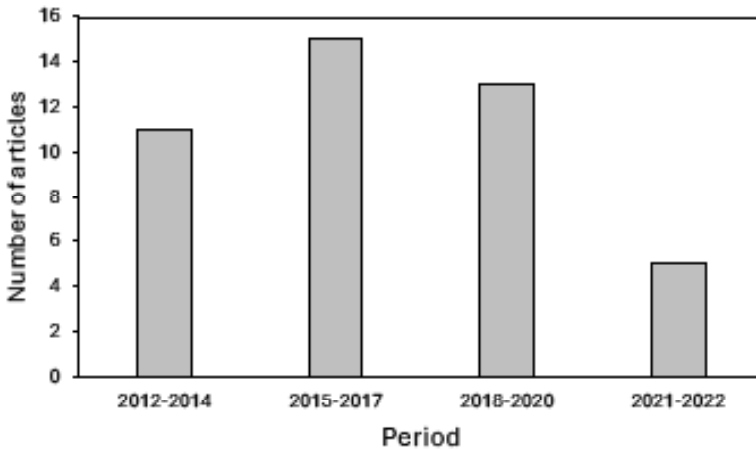


Figure 3. Articles regarding countries

Another notable outcome is the identification of the most referenced publications, which determined the importance of educational drama as a language teaching technique (see Table 3). From the researchers' point of view, comparing the importance of articles from their citation ranking is unjust because some are 10 years old while others are one or two years old. Moreover, this standard is changeable because authors tend to cite the more recent relevant articles over time.

Table 3. Most cited articles

Article title	Author (year)	Journal	Citation
The reduction of speaking anxiety in EFL learners through drama techniques	Atas (2015)	Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences	118
The effectiveness of drama as an instructional approach for the development of second language oral fluency, comprehensibility, and accentedness	Galante & Thomson (2017)	Tesol Quarterly	99
Boosting language skills of English learners through dramatization and movement	Greenfader & Brouillette (2013)	The Reading Teacher	93
Effect of a performing arts program on the oral language skills of young English learners	Greenfader et al. (2015)	Reading Research Quarterly	63
Nine drama activities for foreign language classrooms: Benefits and challenges	Dundar (2013)	Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences	52
Drama: A tool for learning	Kalidas (2014)	Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences	52
Creative drama: A possible way to alleviate foreign language anxiety	Sağlamel & Kayaoğlu (2013)	RELC Journal	48
'Hi doctor, give me handouts': Low proficiency	Al-Gahtani & Roever (2013)	ELT Journal	44
Pedagogic effectiveness of digital storytelling in improving speaking skills of Saudi EFL learners	Eissa (2019)	Arab World English Journal	42
Storytelling and professional learning	Doecke (2015)	Changing English	32
The influence of classroom drama on English learners' academic language use during English language arts lessons	Anderson & Loughlin (2014)	Bilingual Research Journal	32
The effect of role play strategy on Jordanian EFL tenth grade students' speaking skill	Alzboun et al. (2017)	Arab Journal World	29
Strengthening English language teaching in rural schools through the role-playing: Teachers' motivations	Castro & Villafuerte (2019)	International Journal of Educational Methodology	26
Improving English language learners' idiomatic competence: Does mode of teaching play a role?	Abolfazli Khonbi & Sadeghi (2017)	Iranian Journal of Language Teaching Research	24

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Table 3. (Continued)

Article title	Author (year)	Journal	Citation
Vocabulary acquisition via drama: Welsh as a second language in the primary school setting	Kalogirou et al. (2019)	The Language Learning Journal	23
Enhancing Thai secondary school students' English speaking skills, attitudes and motivation with drama-based activities and Facebook	Wongsa & Son (2022)	Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching	22
Dramatic impact of action research of arts-based teaching on at-risk students	Li et al. (2015)	Educational Action Research	21
Fulfilling the tasks of reading, writing, speaking and listening through drama workshop	Nordin et al. (2012)	Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences	21
Suggestions for an effective drama-based EFL course at a Korean university	Reed & Seong (2013)	Journal of Pan-Pacific Association of Applied Linguistics	18
The arts, the common core, and English language development in the primary grades	Greenfader & Brouillette (2017)	Teachers College Record	17
A suggested syllabus for creative drama course in ELT	Doğan & Cephe (2018)	Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies	16
Speaking up about oracy: The contribution of drama pedagogy to enhanced oral communication	Stinson (2015)	English Teaching: Practice & Critique	14
Learning English through musicals: A case study of social economically disadvantaged aboriginal students in Eastern Taiwan	Lei & Huang (2012)	International Journal of Humanities and Arts Computing	13
The classroom climate in drama lessons taught by teacher trainees	Toivanen et al. (2015)	Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences	11
The effectiveness of drama methods in the development of communication skills	Gabitova et al. (2018)	Revista Publicando	9
Let's write a readers theatre script: The power of negotiation	Haag (2018)	The Reading Teacher	9
Students' perceptions on drama activities in outdoor environments: A case study	Shima et al. (2012)	Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences	7
Stultification and the negotiation of meaning: drama for second language education in Hong Kong schools	DeCoursey & Trent (2016)	Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance	7

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Table 3. (Continued)

Article title	Author (year)	Journal	Citation
Efficacy of role-play in teaching and formative assessment for undergraduate English major students in Saudi Arabia	Keezhatta (2020)	Arab World English Journal	7
Student teachers' experience with improvisation activities for spontaneous speech practice in English	Zondag (2021)	Language Teaching Research	7
Promoting oral presentation skills through drama-based tasks with an authentic audience: A longitudinal study	Lee & Liu (2022)	The Asia-Pacific Education Researcher	7
A study on Turkish EFL teachers' perspectives on using drama to develop students' speaking skills in the EFL classroom	Hismanoglu & Çolak (2019)	Novitas-ROYAL (Research on Youth and Language)	7
Teaching literacy through dramatic storytelling in foundation phase	O'Neill et al. (2016)	Australasian Journal of Early Childhood	5
We are robot engineers drama pedagogy as the core of an integrated Curriculum unit for learning English as a foreign language	Araki-Metcalfé (2012)	Creative Approaches to Research	5
Technology and drama based creative collaborative writing in teaching	Dimililer et al. (2017)	Eurasia Journal of Mathematics, Science and Technology Education	5
Drama pedagogy: Subverting and remaking learning in the thirdspace	Dutton & Rushton (2022)	The Australian Journal of Language and Literacy	5
Taking literature off page! The effectiveness of a blended drama approach for enhancing L2 oral accuracy, pronunciation and complexity	Bora (2021)	Language Teaching Research	4
Increasing students' willingness to communicate: Drama-based approaches to language instruction in English for academic purposes classes	Lee et al. (2020)	TESL Canada Journal	4
Second city teacher training: Applying improvisational theater techniques to the classroom	Talhelm (2015)	English Journal	4
Learner autonomy through role plays in English language teaching	Baranovskaya & Shaforostova (2018)	Journal of Language and Education	4

(Continued on next page)

Table 3. (Continued)

Article title	Author (year)	Journal	Citation
Communication in real-time: ESL students' perception of "TIME OUT" role play	Fong et al. (2018)	Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities	4
Establishing a school-based drama programme: supporting non-specialists to plan and teach a drama programme	Wong (2014)	Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance	2
Drama-based approach in English language teaching	Bessadet (2022)	Arab World English Journal (AWEJ)	2
Dynamics of integration of process drama in EFL classrooms	Alam & Al-Hawamdeh (2022)	E-mentor	2

Research lines are introduced thoroughly in Figure 4. Table 4 displays the number of publications produced by the research line and the progression of these studies over time. The study lines under consideration can be classified into two groups based on the content analysis. Based on the total number of papers, the most researched study lines are linguistic skills (61.37%), with oral communication skills outperforming other skills (43.18%). Non-linguistic skills have been noted (38.63%), including the "others" line, which has several publications examining instructors' thoughts on educational drama techniques in EFL/ESL classrooms (See Table 4).

In response to the second question, the following part provides an overview of the two study lines during the previous 10 years (2012–2022) and discusses future research potential.

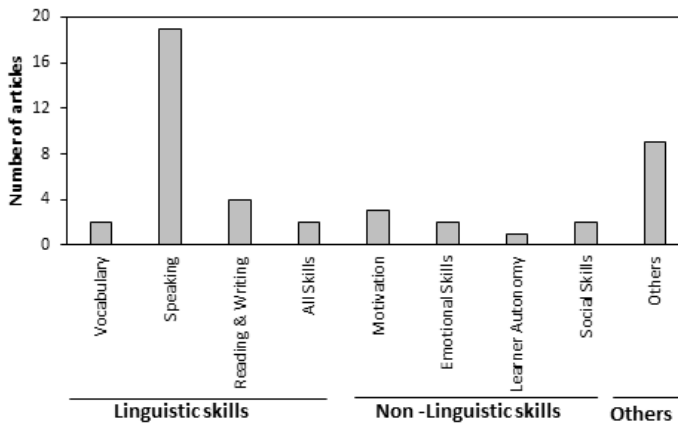
**Figure 4.** Articles by research line (2009–2019)

Table 4. Total number of articles published by research line (2012–2022)

Research line		Author	N	%
Linguistic skills	Vocabulary	Kalogirou et al. (2019); Abolfazli Khonbi & Sadeghi (2017)	2	4.55
	Speaking	Alam & Al-Hawamdeh (2022); Bessadet (2022); Lee & Liu (2022); Wongsu & Son (2022); Bora (2021); Zondag (2021); Eissa (2019); Hismanoglu & Çolak (2019); Fong et al. (2018); Gabitova et al. (2018); Alzboun et al. (2017); Greenfader & Brouillette (2017) English learners (ELs); Thomson & Galante (2016); Greenfader et al. (2015); Atas (2015); Stinson (2015); Al-Gahtani & Roever (2013); Greenfader & Brouillette (2013); Reed & Seong (2013)	19	43.18
	Reading and writing	Haag (2018); Dimililer et al. (2017); O'Neill et al. (2016); Anderson & Loughlin (2014)	4	9.09
	All Skills	Kalidas (2014); Nordin et al. (2012)	2	4.55
Total			27	61.37
Nonlinguistic skills	Motivation	Lee et al. (2020); Castro & Villafuerte (2019); Li et al. (2015)	3	6.81
	Emotional skills	Atas (2015); Sağlamel & Kayaoğlu (2013)	2	4.55
	Learner autonomy	Baranovskaya & Shaforostova (2018)	1	2.27
	Social skills	Keezhatta (2020); Araki-Metcalf (2012)	2	4.55
Others		Dutton & Rushton (2022); Doğan & Cephe (2018); DeCoursey & Trent (2016); Talhelm (2015); Doecke (2015); Toivanen et al. (2015); Wong (2014); Dundar (2013); Shima et al. (2012)	9	20.45
Total			17	38.63

Linguistic Skills

Teaching any language consists of introducing four primary skills listening, speaking, reading and writing. It is a critical challenge to present all these skills accurately, so teachers vary their techniques to help learners achieve their target language. Luckily, drama techniques give learners space to actively participate in their linguistic learning process.

Drama techniques have been the trend of researchers for the last 10 years. They summed up that using these techniques in EFL/ESL classrooms helps students enhance their language

skills holistically (Kalidas, 2014; Anderson & Loughlin, 2014). Nordin et al. (2012) have revealed that educational drama significantly integrates the four language skills to boost students' linguistic competencies.

Speaking skills

Speaking skills are a human component in which people may communicate their thoughts, expertise, sentiments and feelings through a collaborative procedure with other individuals. Human beings speak the language according to their goals and purposes. According to Gilakjani and Sabouri (2016), communicative speaking is a complicated productive skill to learn and teach. The significance of speaking skills cannot be neglected, but developing this skill is challenging for both teachers and students. Due to the international failure of traditional instructional methodologies in EFL/ESL instruction language, especially speaking skills, these skills have often been ignored inside the classroom, notwithstanding their significance (Ahmed, 2019; Galante & Thomson, 2017; Joma et al., 2016). Simultaneously with this ignorance, the need to search for new methods and test their effectiveness has emerged, including educational drama. EFL teachers should modify their conventional teaching methods and implement drama techniques to assess their students' speaking abilities (Eissa, 2019). The search started investigating the efficacy of educational drama on various linguistic skills and areas, such as communicative ones.

Generally, educational drama is the core of existence; it is a particular mode of communication that allows participants to collaborate and express themselves more effectively in daily situations (Fong et al., 2018). Through drama activities, learners' imagination creates their communication environment. In other words, conditions are designed for learners to communicate naturally as the classroom doors open to the outside world (Greenfader & Brouillette, 2017; 2013). Moreover, they are a potent tool for engaging students with content and can be successfully incorporated in language classrooms to attain a communicative aim by integrating four fundamental language skills (LSRW) (Alam & Al-Hawamdeh, 2022).

Educational drama is not restricted to introducing new information. On the contrary, it enhances their ability to use what they have learned. With this merit, educational drama techniques are functional and suitable for speaking classes since they offer learners opportunities to learn and use the language for actual purposes by putting them in social situations where they can reflect, envision, communicate, interact with natural objects, and express their opinions on many social concerns (Alam & Al-Hawamdeh, 2022; Gabitova et al., 2018).

Moreover, drama techniques can be crucial in assisting students in developing communicative competence (Zondag, 2021) when employed as part of an eclectic approach to language teaching. It increases students' understanding of the target language and culture, enhances their ability to comprehend real-world events, and aids them in making sense of their non-linguistic surroundings (Bessadet, 2022). According to Greenfader and Brouillette (2017), drama practices inspire learners to study rather than sit passively. They can help students overcome their shyness about public speaking and boost learner-centred

classroom activities. As a result, automatic communication, mainly speaking, was noticed between students and teacher-student encounters while playing the roles.

Dramatisation speaking activities improve fluency and pronunciation in non-threatening atmospheres by creating cooperative and safe situations that make students feel comfortable during oral practice (Wongsa & Son, 2022; Bora, 2021). It is stated that English language learners (ELs) who started with the least amount of English language proficiency benefited the most from the educational drama programme (Lee & Liu, 2022; Hismanoglu & Çolak, 2019; Fong et al., 2018; Thomson & Galante, 2016; Greenfader et al., 2015; Stinson, 2015; Al-Gahtani & Roever, 2013; Greenfader & Brouillette, 2013).

Vocabulary

Teachers feel that the course materials manage vocabulary adequately and that planning is unnecessary (Nation, 2011). However, some studies in vocabulary acquisition recommend using a variety of chances for practice, such as receptive and productive forms and exposing learners to the target language (Nation & Chung, 2009). According to Sabah and Nesrine (2022), students struggle with vocabulary competency, ranging from word usage and part-of-speech recognition to memorisation. Weak vocabulary results in weak writing and speaking skills (Sabah & Nesrine, 2022). Vocabulary acquisition through educational drama provides multiple chances since students are given contextualised input and encouraged to respond. Later, participants participate in dramatic performance challenges to practice the new vocabulary (Kalogirou et al., 2019; Abolfazli Khonbi & Sadeghi, 2017). In other words, playing various characters in an imaginary world allows children to gain more vocabulary suitable for different situations and facilitate understanding of idioms (Abolfazli Khonbi & Sadeghi, 2017). This knowledge forms the infrastructure for employing this vocabulary in spoken and written conversations daily (O'Neill et al., 2016).

Reading and writing

Reading and writing skills are connected firmly. The more students read, the more they broaden their vocabulary and learn proper use (Yildirim et al., 2020). In drama activities, learners' exposure to materials with a common language improves their reading abilities (O'Neill et al., 2016). They also enhance independent reading throughout the curriculum (Talhalm, 2015; Sanacore & Palumbo, 2010). Overall, learners' reading comprehension skills have been linked to their interests (Anderson & Loughlin, 2014; Nordin et al., 2012).

Drama's value resides in enhancing students' reading and writing skills and fostering a broader perspective of human experiences by placing students in varied circumstances and utilising their imaginations (Haag, 2018). On the other hand, dramatic handwriting scripts are the most compelling drama technique for building and improving writing skills because handwriting encourages individuals to pay more attention to the details of their writing such as spelling, punctuation, grammar and sentence structure.

Non-Linguistic Skills

Non-linguistic skills are a group of skills that help learners to build healthy relationships and control their feelings, motivation, autonomy and empathy, thus facilitating and preparing learners for the instructional process. Teachers are responsible for elevating learners' readiness in classrooms (Funseth, 2020). Therefore, they adjust their teaching techniques, methods, and strategies to help to improve their social and emotional skills, motivation and learner autonomy. The following section presents how educational drama affects emotional and social skills, motivation and learner autonomy.

Emotional and social skills

There is widespread agreement regarding the value of social and emotional abilities in daily life. They are a group of skills that enhance young and adult flexibility to build healthy relationships, make wise decisions, and manage emotions, viewpoints and behaviours. These abilities forecast success at jobs, academic achievements, personal happiness and long-lasting close relationships (Durlak et al., 2011). In the educational field, they can raise academic achievement, increase student motivation and boost learners' concentration. Schools can create solid emotional foundations to flourish and maintain good mental health.

Recent studies on educational drama highlight its potential and crucial role in fostering the growth of emotional and social skills. Through educational drama, students' relationships are strengthened when they are placed in the shoes of others. They get a sense of others' feelings. As a result, they better understand empathy for others and express their emotions and sentiments. Educational drama techniques, in particular, help learners accept the challenges and uniqueness of others. It provides a warm climate where students feel free to be themselves, showing their real identities.

Foreign language anxiety is a passive emotional factor influencing FL learners' performance and learning. High levels of language anxiety and a lack of assurance and comfort while talking in English have been linked to students' inability to communicate (Elahi Shirvan et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2017). Nevertheless, Lee et al. (2020) revealed that the scenarios of dramatised activities give students a chance to communicate meaningfully, get along with their peers, and learn how to deal with emotions that prevent them from doing so. Dramatised exercises can effectively develop motivating, secure, fun, participatory and supportive language learning settings that boost students' self-confidence, improve their academic communication abilities and lessen their communication anxiety. This issue is reduced via educational drama. It fosters a relaxed, engaging, and non-threatening classroom environment in which students may grapple with the perplexity of decision-making without feeling stressed or afraid of making a mistake. In other words, worry, tension and stress are reduced to their bare minimum (Atas, 2015; Sağlamel & Kayaoğlu, 2013).

Moreover, dramatic activities engage learners no matter what their level is. Through involvement in real-world situations, students' passive social skills are decreased and positive

ones are increased (Li et al., 2015; Sağlamel & Kayaoğlu, 2013). Moreover, educational drama techniques push participants into others' shoes to enhance their viewpoints on others and vanish prejudice based on sex, religion, ethnicity and colour. As a result, negative emotions like loneliness and rejection dread are at their lowest point. In conclusion, educational drama activities encourage acceptance, belonging, freedom and respect among classroom students (Sağlamel & Kayaoğlu, 2013).

Learner autonomy and motivation

Learner autonomy is thought to be a multifaceted and diverse term. Learner autonomy substantially impacts the effectiveness of students' achievement in higher education. Scientists defined it as taking responsibility for one's learning, which necessitates intrinsic motivation, topic awareness, and metacognitive abilities. According to Baranovskaya and Shaforostova (2018), drama techniques significantly enhance learners' autonomy in EFL classrooms. And this contribution is vital in making students aware of the aims and substance of instruction, allowing them to participate in goal-setting procedures and creatively apply classroom knowledge.

Motivation is a critical component of second/foreign learning and willingness to communicate. Learners will be more motivated and eager to utilise the language if the language-learning process is fun and gratifying. It is the instructor's responsibility to improve crucial elements that combine to affect students' willingness to talk favourably. Drama can be one of these tools (Lee et al., 2020; Li et al., 2015). Literature included in this study stated educational drama techniques positively influence learners' motivation. They let learners be responsible for their learning; thus, they become motivated to prove themselves among classmates and work harder to achieve that. For instance, their academic achievement has increased (Li et al., 2015).

On the other hand, Castro and Villafuerte (2019) studied the teachers' motivation to use drama techniques in teaching EFL classrooms. They found despite the additional time and effort required, male and female instructors are highly motivated to use drama as a teaching technique. This is because it encourages collaborative and creative learning, improves their confidence to articulate ideas and feelings in English as a foreign language, and improves their confidence to express thoughts and feelings in English as a foreign language (Castro & Villafuerte, 2019).

As shown in Table 4, some researchers investigated drama in different aspects unrelated to linguistic and non-linguistic skills like translanguaging space, outdoor drama, teaching skills, perceptions of teachers and students, teacher training, classroom environment and establishing drama school programmes. This reflects the reality of the widespread and growing use of drama in the educational process, as well as in the training and qualification of teachers in the field. It prepares future educators to utilise these techniques after graduation and upon entering the field of education.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This systematic bibliometric review, focusing on educational drama in EFL/ESL within the last decade, underscores the significance of the *Arab World English Journal* as a primary platform for scholarly dissemination. Notably, the study reveals that the foremost contributors to this field predominantly originate from the U.S. American educators' widespread adoption of this approach traces back to the initiation of Heathcote's pioneering drama techniques in the 1970s. Heathcote's substantial contributions, particularly in the domain of drama in education, have left a lasting imprint on teaching methodologies, significantly influencing the application of drama as an instructional tool by educators.

Linguistic and non-linguistic skills were the main focus of research in drama, which prompted researchers to generate theoretical and empirical investigations throughout the last 10 years. Another significant result was identifying the goal of enhancing EFL/ESL speaking skills as the most referenced topic by the scientific community. Speaking anxiety from emotional skills occupied the most-cited article (Atas, 2015). Developing oral skills through drama also received second place in the most-cited papers. This reflected the researchers' orientation towards the role of drama techniques in developing speaking skills. Teachers' thoughts on educational drama also received some attention.

The analysis of these research lines indicated that EFL/ESL societies complained about linguistic weakness among learners and even employees. Fong et al. (2018) stated that more than 90% of employers said graduates must urgently improve their English skills. Moreover, they added that ministries of education lamented the efforts of students and the deficit in grasping English communication skills at elementary, intermediate and matriculation levels even after 13 years of language learning. This is due to various factors: the educational policy in schools and universities where language is introduced for exams, the ignorance of some skills, and the extensive use of traditional methods.

Moreover, students' formative experiences should be changed, and teaching techniques should align with current educational trends, such as educational drama. Role-playing, improvisation, the mantle of the expert, process drama, hot seat, mime and other current instructional techniques have been explicitly linked to constructivist notions in the literature. These placed students in imaginary and real situations requiring them to work collaboratively with others, debate viewpoints and understand multiple sociocultural aspects of humans.

Despite the positive findings of instructional research using drama techniques, some researchers have expressed various reservations regarding classroom drama implementation. For example, Bessadet (2022) and Kalogirou et al. (2019) agreed that using drama to deal with EFL contexts was a vital challenge because of the need for manuals to guide teachers step-by-step through the performance; otherwise, untrained teachers will have difficulties. Furthermore, in speaking activities, weak interlocutors who cannot express their messages and disrupt dialogue provide an additional risk (Al-Gahtani & Roever, 2013). Others

observed limitations within their practicum school that hampered their ability to realise the aforementioned imagined benefits (DeCoursey & Trent, 2016).

To conclude, educational drama is a deceptively simple technique which deceives untrained teachers. So, it is advised to train teachers and provide them with manuals and qualified consultants. It is also worth noting that the teacher's drive and contribution are equally crucial because they are familiar with their pupils and can tailor activities, lessons, and class pace to fit their level, comprehension and prior knowledge (Alam & Al-Hawamdeh, 2022). Yet, drama techniques suggest using student-created resources and activities in the classroom to investigate their effectiveness in teaching English.

FURTHER RESEARCH AND LIMITATIONS

From a methodological standpoint, it is vital to note that the research equation used in this study may create a drawback. Despite setting a lengthy research equation, this critical methodological decision impacts the number of articles collected. Three databases have been searched to produce as complete as feasible research; other studies may have been overlooked. Similarly, including English-language articles as a criterion may have influenced the findings; in the coming years, the study may be expanded to include books, reviews and chapters written in different languages. Another restriction is the criterion used to pick the articles in the study, based on studies published over 10 years (2012–2022). This standard may have led to only a few included pieces of research. Future research should look for and analyse publications for extended periods.

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