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## **Experiment as a research method for investigating the effectiveness of drama in EFL Higher Education: A systematic review**

**ABSTRACT.** The shift towards communicative teaching has led to the need of developing innovative approaches to teaching English as a foreign language. Among them, drama methodologies have gained increasing attention for their ability to enhance language learning efficiency. Although research indicates a positive contribution of drama to language learning, its application in university education remains largely unexplored. This study addresses this gap by systematically reviewing recent studies on drama techniques in higher education EFL classrooms and summarising experimental research trends and limitations in this context. Following the search in Scopus and Web of Science databases, 11 studies were identified according to inclusion and exclusion criteria for qualitative analysis. The results revealed an overall positive influence of drama on language classrooms. However, certain limitations were revealed, and more rigorous empirical studies are needed. By addressing these gaps, this review provides valuable insights. It proposes directions for future research, aiming to expand empirical research and establish drama in English language teaching as a generally accepted method.

**KEYWORDS:** drama-based teaching, EFL higher education, experimental research, drama intervention.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

With the recent shift in language education toward a more communicative approach, innovative teaching methods, like using literary works and arts have gained popularity (Pardede 2011). As a result, educators widely develop contextual learning, extend their curriculum content beyond textbooks and make teaching more flexible, thereby enabling students to apply knowledge and learn from their daily lives (Yan et al. 2018). Since drama reflects real-life language use and promotes spontaneous communication (Holden 1981), incorporating

it into the classroom environment can provide an interesting new approach to language teaching (Kao & O'Neill 1998). Davies (1990) highlights that, with the growing emphasis on communicative approaches to language learning, dramatized learning emerges as a functional and creative teaching tool promoting the use of natural language.

Furthermore, Kao and O'Neill (1998) note the limited research on the dynamics of drama-based language classrooms, with much of the literature relying on philosophy and anecdotal evidence rather than empirical studies. Although more empirical research has emerged in the past two decades, it remains insufficient to justify the inclusion of drama in all curricula. Wessels (1987) highlights several challenges when implementing drama in language teaching, citing factors such as shy students, activity selection and managing corrections without disrupting performances. In addition, Holden (1981) adds that maintaining discipline is key to preventing chaos during certain activities. Further research is needed to investigate drama techniques in the classroom and address these challenges.

A growing body of research has demonstrated the positive effects of incorporating drama techniques into language teaching (Araki & Raphael 2018; Kuimova et al. 2016; Ozmen 2010; Park 2015). Drama improves speech fluency, broadens vocabulary and grammar, and enhances expressive vocalisation. It is particularly beneficial for students who struggle with public speaking, as it creates a secure environment for practice (Erbaugh 1990; Gill 2008). Engaging in role-playing fictional scenarios motivates learners to take risks with language, improve pronunciation and reduce the fear of making mistakes (Brash & Warnecke 2009). In addition, Stern (1980) highlights the psychological benefits of drama, noting how it stimulates oral communication and boosts motivation and confidence while reducing learners' sensitivity to rejection during classes.

However, many studies are quite disconnected from one another and often focus only on the emotional or cognitive aspect of implementing drama in teaching. Miller and Gkonou (2018) argue for a broader review considering the complex relationship between emotional and social dimensions of learning. Furthermore, Baldwin and Galazka (2021) advocate for the use of the ethics-of-care perspective, a philosophical framework that underscores the importance of relationships and empathy. The inclusion of this approach in process drama might encourage the creation of friendships and reduce stress. Drama also shapes teacher identity and professional competence in pre-service EFL education. Ozmen (2010) demonstrated how drama allows future teachers to adopt classroom roles and behaviours that enhance the learning process. Shand (2008) emphasised that drama should not only be an inherent part of EFL teacher training but also be considered a core methodology to be used throughout the course.

Although the role of drama in shaping teacher identity and professional competencies in pre-service EFL education has been acknowledged, its use in training programs remains limited. Research on its practical application in higher education has yet to be fully developed, pointing to a gap in empirical studies exploring its effectiveness in EFL teacher education (Horasan-Dogan & Cephe 2018). Therefore, this paper intends to fill that gap by summarising and analysing empirical studies on how drama techniques can be integrated into EFL higher education. It will also examine the trends and limitations of using experiments as a research method to explore the effects of drama on teaching and assess whether drama can be a core methodology in teacher preparation programs.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Experimental research provides valuable insights into the cause-and-effect relationships that occur when specific interventions are tested in educational research. Experiments are connected to theoretical frameworks, whereby hypotheses are formulated about how variables interrelate at the outset (Duit & Tesch 2010). This repetitive relationship between theory and experimentation drives innovation in teaching methodologies. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) highlight that the long-standing priorities for researchers have been investigating casualties and predicting outcomes. Central to such investigation is incorporating control mechanisms within studies, exemplified in experimental design.

Winston and Blais (1996) explain how experiments are organised procedures that involve the manipulation of an independent variable while controlling external factors. Similarly, Keppel (1991) and Cahit (2015: 111) describe experimental research as a technique that needs to be formulated to determine the effect of a standalone treatment or intervention on an outcome and the relationship between variables. Ideally, this process typically includes the exposure of one group to the intervention and its absence to a second group, followed by a comparison of their performance. In research terms, these two groups are called experimental (exposed) and control (unexposed) groups. Experimental methodologies are generally categorised into two types: actual experiments and quasi-experiments. The key difference between them lies in participant assignment; true experiments use random assignments while quasi-experiments do not, which can potentially limit the latter's internal validity.

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) explain the key characteristics of experimental research in education: researchers intentionally control and manipulate

the conditions that influence the events of the teaching process they are investigating. They introduce an intervention and measure its impact. This process involves altering the value of one variable, known as the independent variable, and observing its effect on another, referred to as the dependent variable.

In this review, we will use the categorisation made by Gay et al. (2011: 268), who divided group experiments into four main designs, which are as follows:

- a) pre-experimental designs (the one-shot case, the group pretest-posttest design, and the static group comparison),
- b) true experimental designs (the pretest-posttest control group, the posttest only control group, and the Solomon four-group design),
- c) quasi-experimental design (the nonequivalent control group design, the time-series design),
- d) factorial designs (Gay et al. 2011: 268).

Quasi-experimental designs differ from true experiments, yet they resemble them, which is what the prefix quasi means. Nonequivalent group designs are a type of quasi-experimental research design in which participants are divided into groups without the use of randomisation. Pre-test/post-test designs involve measuring the dependent variable before and after a treatment but lack random assignment, and interrupted time series designs include multiple measurements before and after a treatment to track changes over time (Cook & Campbell 1979).

There is also another design called the single-subject design, which Gay et al. (2011: 312) define as “designs that can be applied when the sample size is one or when a number of individuals are considered as one group.”

These single-subject designs are divided into three categories: A-B-A withdrawal, multiple-baseline, and alternating treatment designs. In an A-B-A design, a baseline condition (A) is followed by a treatment (B) and then a return to the baseline, allowing researchers to observe changes in the dependent variable and attribute them to the treatment. In multiple-baseline design, treatment is introduced at different times across participants, behaviours, or settings to avoid ethical concerns or the possibility of permanent effects. An alternating treatment design rapidly switches back and forth between treatments to compare their effectiveness (Sidman 1960).

In quantitative research, the fundamental requirements for a research instrument are to guarantee its validity and reliability. Together with criteria such as objectivity, testability, and the ability to generalise findings through statistical analysis, these elements form the foundation of reliable quantitative research (Gavora 2013: 511). For example, Bačíková and Janovská (2018: 41) note that, in

experiments, validity is crucial for guaranteeing the reliability of the results. Internal validity ensures that the variation in the dependent variable is due solely to the independent variable and not to external factors. While strict control can ensure internal validity, it may also reduce external validity, which refers to the degree to which the results are applicable in real-life situations. The research design and measurement tools should not violate validity for the findings to be accurate and generalizable.

According to Bracht and Glass (1968), most experiments intend to generalise their results to a general population and other conditions beyond that study. It is what external validity defines, where the establishment of these effects can be widely applied to other subjects, settings, or tests. The threat to external validity arises in two significant ways: when the findings are limited to a particular group of people participating in the experiment or restricted to specific conditions.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

A systematic review was conducted to explore the effects of drama techniques in experimental research on EFL higher education students and pre-service teacher trainees. Systematic reviews, valued for their ability to synthesise knowledge comprehensively (Hart 2018), rely on methodologies like PRISMA, which evolved from the QUOROM statement to standardise reporting and improve clarity (Moher et al. 2009). This review aims to synthesise the results of the reviewed studies, identifying key findings and implications of using experimental research methods to examine the effects of drama in EFL higher education.

To complement and support this objective, following research questions have been constructed:

- RQ1: How are experimental models commonly designed to examine the effects of drama on EFL students in higher education?
- RQ2: What types of intervention programs have been implemented to study the effects of drama in EFL higher education students?
- RQ3: What are the key outcomes of integrating drama in EFL higher education?
- RQ4: What are the limitations and challenges of using experiment as a research method in drama-based studies, and how can future methodologies be improved?

### 3.1. Information sources and search strategy

The study selection process involved a single reviewer, and the automation tool Rayyan (a free platform) was used to assist in the screening process (Ouzani et al. 2016). A comprehensive bibliographic search was conducted across the Web of Science and Scopus databases. The search strategy incorporated a combination of keywords: “drama, EFL higher education, pre-service EFL education, creative drama, psychological and pedagogical impacts, process drama and drama-based activities.”

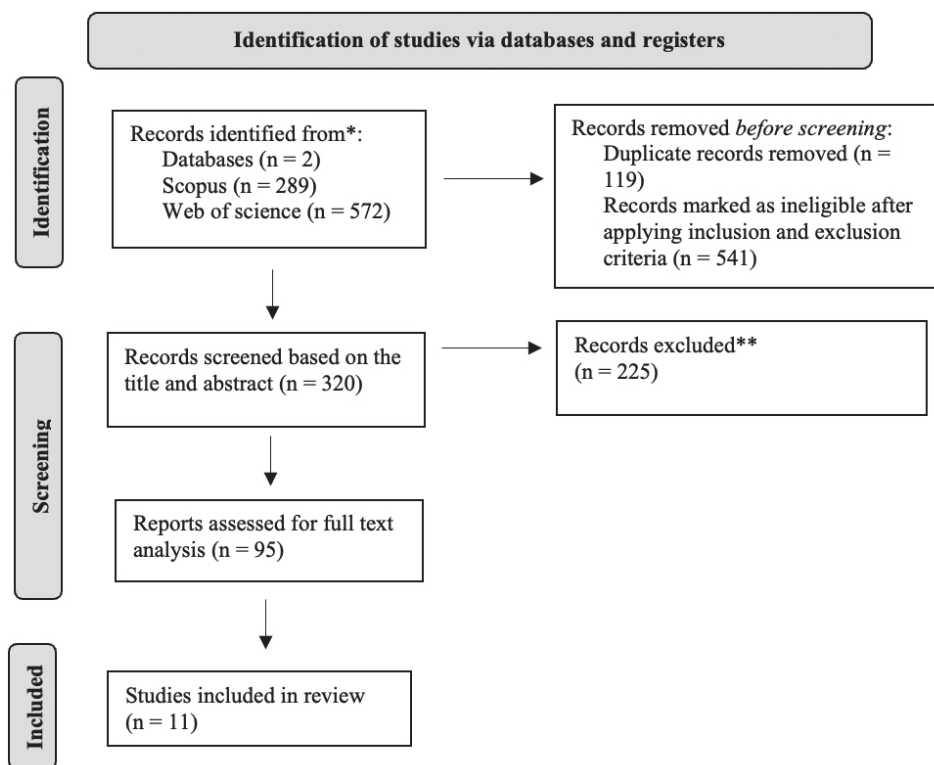
### 3.2. Eligibility criteria

The search was conducted using pre-defined eligibility criteria and a thematic synthesis approach. Studies were included if they assessed the impact of drama-based EFL teaching on pre-service teachers and higher education students, employed experimental methods and explored factors influencing EFL learning outcomes through drama. Only studies published in English within the last 10 years, peer-reviewed, empirical and with open access were considered.

Consequently, studies were excluded if they did not involve EFL higher education participants, did not use experimental research designs, were non-peer-reviewed or grey literature, were published before January 2014 or lacked outcomes related to language learning or teaching.

### 3.3. Search results

Initial search retrieved 980 studies from the two databases (Web of Science:  $n = 572$ ; Scopus:  $n = 289$ ), and 119 duplicate studies were identified and removed from the review. Subsequently, 541 studies were marked as ineligible after applying inclusion and exclusion criteria, and 320 studies were screened based on their titles and abstracts. During this stage, 95 studies were evaluated in full, from which 11 studies were included in the review. An overview of the selected studies is provided in Table 1.



**Figure 1.** Adapted PRISMA Flow Diagram

Source: Moher et al. (2009)

## 4. RESULTS

All studies in the systematic review employed quasi-experimental designs. The majority of the studies used single group pre-test/-post-test frameworks ( $n = 7$ ), followed by control/experimental pre-test/post-test design ( $n = 3$ ), while one study implemented a time-series classroom-based control/experimental group design. The studies spanned multiple countries from all around the world, with Türkiye contributing the most ( $n = 3$ ), followed by Kazakhstan ( $n = 2$ ), and others, including Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Thailand, France, Iraq and Taiwan. The systematic review focused on the effects of drama techniques on pre-service education and higher education students, all of whom were EFL learners. Sample sizes varied considerably, ranging from small groups of 12–15 students (Horasan-Doğan & Cephe 2020; Korkut & Çelik 2021) to a more extensive samples of 70 students (Keezhatta 2020). Gender was mentioned in some



studies in which female students were dominant – an unsurprising fact, given that the teaching profession is predominantly feminised.

**Table 1.** Studies selected in the review with their assigned number

Number of the study	Name, author, year
Study 1	Drama: A neglected source in language teaching to improve communication (Altun 2019)
Study 2	Improvisation and role-play as enactive pedagogical devices to learn and teach English as a foreign language (Breauté 2023)
Study 3	The effect of creative drama on the writing anxiety of pre-service classroom teachers (Erdoğan 2018)
Study 4	The effectiveness of drama methods in the development of communication skills (Gabitova et al. 2018)
Study 5	The effects of creative drama on student teachers' creative pedagogy and identity (Horasan-Dogan & Cephe 2020)
Study 6	Promoting oral presentation skills through drama-based tasks with an authentic audience: A longitudinal study (Lee & Liu 2022)
Study 7	Efficacy of role-play in teaching and formative assessment for undergraduate English major students in Saudi Arabia (Keezhatta 2020)
Study 8	Developing pronunciation through creative drama (Korkut & Celik 2018)
Study 9	Fostering pre-service EFL teachers' communicative competence through role-playing games (Kuzembayeva et al. 2023)
Study 10	Learning oral communication skills through dramatic dialogues: A case study of graduates of Pakistani universities (Mahmood et al. 2020)
Study 11	The effects of role-playing simulation activities on the improvement of EFL students' business English oral communication (Tipmontree & Tasanameelarp 2018)

Source: own study.

A well-researched table (see Table 2) highlights the ongoing research on the application of drama techniques in EFL higher education. The table presents information on intervention design, activities, data collection and outcomes. The next section describes each study individually, highlighting these aspects.

Study 1 by Altun (2019) aimed to assess the influence of role-play and simulation activities on communication skills. The study employed a one-group pre-test/post-test design, with 30 third-year ELT students in Iraq. The intervention lasted for one semester, with weekly 3-hour drama classes. Data were collected



through pre- and post-survey questionnaires, reflecting the quantitative nature of the research. A paired sample t-test measured the differences between pre- and post-intervention data. All p-values reported less than 0.5, highlighting significant results, showcasing improved perceptions of language learning and oral skills through drama activities.

Breaute (2023) in Study 2 collected the impressions of 22 pre-service EFL teacher trainees about the underrepresentation of artistic practices. The research was based on a pre-test/post-test quasi-experimental design for four two-hour sessions incorporating role-play and improvisation activities. The study employed both quantitative and qualitative approaches, incorporating questionnaires, reflections and analysis of pictures and videos. Findings highlight the benefits of drama for language learning, oral expression and confidence. However, some challenges occurred when trainees were asked to implement these activities, such as a lack of training, personal shyness and limited time in the curriculum. The research also highlighted challenges in implementing artistic practices, as students found them intimidating after years of inactivity.

Study 3 by Erdoğan (2018) employed a one-group pre-test post-test experimental design to investigate creative drama's effects on writing anxiety. The sample comprised 21 pre-service EFL teachers via purposive sampling. The intervention program lasted 12 weeks, with weekly 2-hour sessions based on drama-based activities aimed to alleviate writing anxiety. The quantitative aspect of the study consisted of pre- and post-Writing Anxiety Test scores, while diaries and interviews were used to gather qualitative data from the participants. Interviews were conducted face-to-face using a tape recorder to gather data. Cronbach's alpha (0.97) confirmed scale reliability. Wilcoxon signed-rank was used to determine whether significant differences occurred. Diaries were analysed using content analysis by three external researchers, and recordings were analysed using decomposition and coding methods. The findings from tests, supported by interviews and diaries, revealed a reduction in writing anxiety levels.

Gabitova et al. (2018) in Study 4 used a pre-test post-test experimental/control group design to examine drama as a supplementary teaching tool in language learning. The sample comprised 60 second-year EFL students from Kazan Federal University in Kazakhstan. The intervention program lasted the entire academic year, and utilised several drama-based teaching techniques, such as process drama, scripted and applied drama and readers' theatre. Data collection relied on a quantitative approach before and after interventions, using questionnaires (to reveal interest levels in drama) and tests (to evaluate motivation levels and measure speaking skills). A detailed description of the specific statistical analysis was not mentioned, although the results were described. The

experimental group showed improved speaking skills, creativity, motivation, and expressiveness compared to the control group.

Case Study 5 by Horasan-Dogan and Cephe (2020) employed a quasi-experimental pre-test and post-test design. A mixed-method approach ensured validity through triangulation. Qualitative measures (observations, focus group interviews and reflections) outweighed the quantitative ones (analytical rubric). Fifteen teacher trainees were selected through a convenience sampling method at XXX University in Türkiye, who participated in a 30-hour creative drama workshop held twice a week. To avoid the halo effect, three raters observed participants' skills. Two observations were found reliable after the Spearman Rank Order Correlation showed high consistency. Inductive content analysis was used to analyse qualitative data in MAXQDA 12. A paired sample t-test showed a significant improvement in pedagogical skills, with post-test scores ( $M = 3.2314$ ,  $SD = .24804$ ) significantly higher than pre-test scores ( $M = 1.5179$ ,  $SD = .35772$ ),  $t(14) = -21.591$ ,  $p = .000$ , indicating enhanced teaching performance after the creative drama workshop.

In Study 6, Lee and Liu (2022) examined drama-based pedagogy for oral presentations using a time-series classroom-based quasi-experimental design. The sample, consisting of 42 EFL students from a Taiwanese university, was split into control and experimental groups. The intervention lasted 18 weeks, two hours per week, and was filled with activities such as storytelling, rehearsals, monologues and scripted plays with six drama elements. Before the intervention, all participants prepared presentations, which were observed and rated by two public speaking professionals unfamiliar with the students. Quantitative measures included professional raters' judgment (inter-rater reliability was 0.92, ensuring consistency) and a self-perceived presentation techniques questionnaire (reliability score = 0.922). The qualitative component consisted of a post-study interview, where two raters collaborated to ensure consistent coding and alignment. Significantly enhanced oral presentation skills were highlighted, with the most notable pronunciation improvements occurring when students presented to real-life audiences.

Study 7 by Keezhatta (2020) focused on evaluating role-play activities as teaching and assessment strategies for 70 undergraduate English major students and 20 teachers from the departments of English at Prince Sattam Bin Abdulaziz University in Saudi Arabia. The study employed a pre-test/post-test design with experimental and control groups. A detailed description of the duration of the intervention was not provided, although it was mentioned that data collection occurred over a two-month period. A t-test was conducted before the intervention to determine whether any differences existed between the control and experimental groups in terms of prior English knowledge. The study used tests to

assess students' grammar, functions and vocabulary, along with closed-ended structured questionnaires administered to teachers to evaluate the impact and challenges of role-play. A panel of experts reviewed the tests to ensure validity and reliability, which was verified using Cronbach's alpha. SPSS and t-tests were used to analyse and compare data.

In Study 8 by Korkut and Celik (2018), the aim was to explore creative drama's impact on pronunciation. The study used a pre-test and post-test model with an intervention program lasting 18 hours over six days. The sample comprised 12 volunteer ELT students at a state university in Türkiye. Data was collected through pre- and post-tests and read-aloud tasks, which were recorded. Two coders marked the results and analysed them using the Wilcoxon signed rank test, which is frequently used for small samples. Post-test scores (31.16) were higher than pre-test scores (26.08), showcasing improved intonation, stress, and communicative pronunciation.

Study 9 by Kuzembayeva et al. (2023) employed a semi-experimental pre-test/post-test control group design to examine the use of role-playing games in teaching dialogue speech. The sample, comprising 36 pre-service EFL teachers at the Baishev University in the Republic of Kazakhstan, was divided into control and experimental groups based on their educational program schedule. The intervention program lasted for the whole academic year and included various controlled-type exercises that helped to introduce specific topic and assess learners' knowledge. Games were also conducted using video materials and presentations. Results showed communication competence increased from 17% to 28% (+11%).

Mahmood et al. (2020) in their Study 10 focused on assessing the role of dramatic performance in English learning. The researchers used a pre-test and post-test model, where two groups of 40 students performed King Lear dialogues, showing significant post-test improvements in confidence, pronunciation and body language. Data was collected purely through qualitative methods of observation and recordings. There is no mention of statistical analysis being used in the study.

In Study 11, Tipmontree and Tasaanameela (2018) implemented a quasi-experimental single-group pre-test and post-test design to investigate the effects of role-playing simulation activities on students' oral communication abilities. Both qualitative methods (teacher and student diaries) and quantitative methods (attitudes questionnaire and speaking tests) were employed to enhance the scope and detail of the findings. One class of 45 third-year Thai EFL university students participated in weekly 3-hour sessions for 12 weeks. Three experienced English lecturers reviewed the data to ensure validity and reliability, and t-tests were used to assess pre- and post-test results.

**Table 2.** Overview of key themes derived from the systematic review

Author(s)/ Year / Country	Research design	Research aims	Participants	Intervention plan / Duration	Measuring instruments	Key findings
Altun (2019) / Iraq	single-group pre-test post-test	Assess role- play and simulation in communication skills	30 third-year ELT students	Weekly 3-hour drama classes for one se- mester	Pre- and post- surveys	Improved perception of language learn- ing, oral skills
Breauate (2023) / France	single-group pre-test post-test	Address under- representation of artistic practices	22 pre-service English teach- ers	Four 2-hour sessions with role-play, im- provisation	Pre-/post- questionnaires, videos, reflec- tions	Enhanced creativity, oral expression, confidence, classroom relationships
Erdoğan (2018) / Türkiye	single-group pre-test post- test	Investigate creative dra- ma's effect on writing anxiety	21 pre-service teachers	12 weeks of drama-based writing activi- ties	Writing anxiety tests, diaries, interviews	Reduced writing anxi- ety, improved preparedness, confidence
Gabitova et al. (2018) / Kazakhstan	pre-test post- test (control group)	Highlight drama as a supplemental teaching tool	60 2nd-year EFL students	Warm-ups, pantomimes, role-plays, simulations	Pre-/post- questionnaires, motivation tests	Improved speaking skills, creativity, moti- vation, expres- siveness
Horasan- Dogan (2020) / Türkiye	single-group pre-test and post-test	Assess creative drama's impact on pedagogy and identity	15 senior ELT student teach- ers	15 two-hour creative drama workshops	Observations, focus group interviews	Enhanced pedagogy, crea- tivity, identity awareness, body language
Lee & Liu (2022) / Taiwan	time-series classroom- based (control group)	Study drama- based peda- gogy for oral presentations	42 EFL students (control & experimental)	Two semesters, weekly 2-hour drama classes	Rater evalua- tions, SPPTQ, interviews	Improved pres- entation skills, confidence, authenticity, teamwork
Keezhatta (2020) / Saudi Arabia	pretest-posttest (control group)	Evaluate role- play in teaching and assessment	70 EFL students (control & experimental)	Role-play in grammar, vo- cabulary, and functions	Pre-/post-tests, questionnaires	Resolved class- room interper- sonal issues
Korkut & Celik (2018) / Türkiye	single-group pre-test and post-test	Explore crea- tive drama's impact on pronunciation	12 ELT stu- dents	18 hours of creative drama in six days	Pronunciation tests	Improved int- onation, stress, communicative pronunciation
Kuzembayeva et al. (2023) / Kazakhstan	pre-test/post- test (control group)	Examine role- playing games for dialogue speech	36 EFL students (control & experimental)	Academic year of role-playing games	Pre-/post-tests	Enhanced speaking skills, reduced errors, better dialogue competence
Mahmood et al. (2020) / Pakistan	single-group pre-test post- test	Assess dra- matic perfor- mance's role in English learning	40 English Lit. students (two groups)	Semester- long drama activities and Shakespeare performance	Observations, recordings, pre-/post-tests	Improved confidence, comprehension, pronunciation, non-verbal com- munication
Tipmontree & Tasana- meelarp (2018) / Thailand	single-group pre-test and post-test	Assess role- play for busi- ness English communication	45 Thai EFL students	3-hour weekly sessions for 12 weeks	Speaking tests, peer review	Improved speaking ability, positive student reception

Source: own study.

## 5. DISCUSSION

This section presents a systematic overview of the findings and patterns reported in the analysed studies. It addresses the primary aim by answering the research questions stated earlier in the study. Regarding the first question, which examined how experimental models are commonly designed to study drama-based learning, quasi-experimental designs emerged as the most frequently used model. Miller et al. (2019) suggest that this preference is due to ethical and practical limitations that often make randomisation unfeasible. Quasi-experimental designs allow researchers to estimate causal effects in real-world settings where fully controlled experiments are not possible. The positive findings indicate that this approach is appropriate, though some methodological adjustments could strengthen the precision and robustness of future studies. Notably, only four studies included control groups, and none employed randomisation to strengthen the validity of their findings. Furthermore, the sample sizes in most studies were too small to allow for generalisation to a broader population.

To answer the second research question, this section compares and examines the various intervention designs employed across the studies. The duration of interventions ranged from 8 hours (Bréauté 2023) to an entire academic year (Kuzembayeva et al. 2023), typically conducted weekly during teacher training sessions. The most common methods used were role-play and simulation, used in nearly all the studies to improve communication skills and mitigate fear of public speaking (Gabitova et al. 2018; Kuzembayeva et al. 2023). Most interventions began with icebreakers and warm-up activities, followed by interactive sessions that incorporated pantomime and improvisation (Bréauté 2023; Erdoğan 2018; Gabitova et al. 2018). Although conventional dramatic practices, such as Reader's Theatre and scripted performance, were not widespread, studies by Gabitova et al. (2018) and Mahmood et al. (2020) introduced innovative adaptations that promoted learner creativity. Physical and vocal exercises were primarily used as warm-up exercises (Gabitova et al. 2018; Horasan-Doğan & Cephe 2020), whereas Korkut and Çelik (2021) emphasised voice exercises to improve pronunciation accuracy. However, relaxation and breathing exercises fundamental components of acting were noticeably absent, potentially limiting students' emotional preparedness for language acquisition (Via 1981).

The third research question aimed to synthesise the outcomes of the reviewed studies. The findings consistently demonstrated improvements in speaking fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary building and overall communicative competence (Altun 2019; Bréauté 2023; Gabitova et al. 2018; Korkut & Çelik 2021;

Kuzembayeva et al. 2023; Salim Keezhatta 2020; Tipmontree & Tasanameelarp 2018). Emotional development was also a strong focus in most of the studies, with several studies reporting reductions in language anxiety and increased self-confidence among participants (Bréauté 2023; Erdoğan 2018; Gabitova et al. 2018; Mahmood et al. 2020). Pre-service teachers showed notable improvements in teaching abilities, including preparing lessons, classroom management and the application of effective teaching methodologies (Altun 2019; Bréauté 2023; Horasan-Doğan & Cephe 2020). Improved teamwork and interpersonal relationships were also reported, with students enjoying the element of teamwork in drama activities (Gabitova et al. 2018; Lee & Liu 2022; Mahmood et al. 2020). Furthermore, the development of a sense of belonging fostered motivation and engagement, reinforcing the social benefits of drama activities in educational contexts (Mahmood et al. 2020).

Several limitations emerged across the reviewed studies, highlighting areas for future research. The absence of control groups in many studies proved to be a significant issue, restricting the ability to determine whether observed changes were the result of interventions or influenced by external variables. The use of randomised experimental and control groups would provide more precise comparisons by eliminating other variables from influencing the effects of drama. Additionally, only two studies collected data over extended periods, restricting insight into the long-term effects of drama techniques on EFL teaching. Notably, Lee and Liu's (2022) findings indicated, that their experimental group started to diverge significantly from the control group only in the second semester, so longer implementation is required. Furthermore, several studies ( $n = 5$ ) stated that they focused predominantly on collecting quantitative data, due to the employment of pre/post-tests, which may introduce some subjectivity and decrease the value of data. Applying observational and self-reporting methods could enhance the reporting accuracy of outcomes. Lastly, while some studies employed reliable tools like t-test and Wilcoxon signed-rank tests, they were not often complemented by triangulation except for Horasan-Dogan and Cephe (2020) or rigorous validity checks, which are significant in confirming findings from different sources.

Lastly, our fourth research question, in addition to identifying key limitations, aimed to provide future research recommendations. Studies such as Gabitova et al. (2018) and Horasan-Dogan and Cephe (2020) underline the importance of comprehensive training for practitioners to apply drama techniques accordingly and effectively. Further research should expand to in-service teachers to explore the challenges they face when implementing drama and help develop structured training programs to support their skills' development. Likewise, research should examine how teacher trainees use drama in their early stages



of teaching and develop a framework to help them with difficulties they face such as, time constraints and maintaining discipline. This aligns with Holden (1981), who advocated discipline's importance in maintaining order during certain drama activities.

Notably, none of these studies highlighted the effects of culture on their experiments, yet Ziegahn (2001) advocates that the teaching process and communication styles are always influenced by cultural values, emphasising their significance in the teaching process. Consequently, exploring and understanding how culture affects drama-based learning process would be highly beneficial. Finally, the reviewed studies poorly represented the implementation of digital tools in drama-based learning. Trang (2024) used Zoom's breakout rooms, screen sharing and recording tools to support digital role-plays in an intercultural communication course, enhancing learners' engagement and intercultural competence in a virtual drama-based setting. Future studies should explore this by integrating drama and digital platforms and multimedia tools to evaluate whether it can further enhance the effectiveness of drama interventions.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Our primary goal was to summarise the significant findings and implications of employing experiments to study drama's impact on higher EFL education. The studies reviewed used mainly quasi-experimental designs, drawing on a pre-test/post-test design, reflecting a trend in research methodology. All included studies showed positive results, while studies that included both control and experimental groups showed more reliable data on the significant improvements in communication and speaking skills, creativity, pedagogical skills, and emotional expressiveness. Concurrently, the examined research offers sufficient evidence to support the inclusion of drama in teaching curriculum in EFL classrooms. However, additional empirical research is still necessary, explicitly aiming to overcome these limitations and increase methodological variety. Future research should focus on integrating breathing and relaxation techniques into their interventions, creating larger sample sizes with different cultural backgrounds, designing research for longitudinal examination and incorporating control groups to improve the reliability and validity of findings. Finally, the need for proper training of practitioners has also been identified, highlighting the importance of establishing formal training programs to help teachers and teacher trainees effectively implement drama in their lessons.



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### **Eksperyment jako metoda badawcza w badaniach nad skutecznością dramy w dydaktyce języka angielskiego w szkolnictwie wyższym. Przegląd systematyczny**

ABSTRAKT. Przejście w kierunku nauczania komunikacyjnego stworzyło potrzebę opracowania innowacyjnych podejść do nauczania języka angielskiego jako obcego. Wśród nich szczególne zainteresowanie zyskały metody określane jako *drama techniques* (techniki teatralne) cenione za swój potencjał w zwiększaniu efektywności uczenia się języka. Chociaż badania wskazują na pozytywny wpływ takich działań na proces przyswajania języka, ich zastosowanie w edukacji uniwersyteckiej pozostaje w dużej mierze niewykorzystane. Niniejsze opracowanie podejmuje tę problematykę poprzez systematyczny przegląd najnowszych badań nad wykorzystaniem dramy na zajęciach języka angielskiego jako obcego na poziomie akademickim. W szczególności badanie podsumowuje trendy eksperymentalnych badań w tym obszarze oraz nakreśla zidentyfikowane ograniczenia. Analiza, oparta na wynikach wyszukiwania w bazach Scopus i Web of Science, objęła 11 badań zakwalifikowanych na podstawie przyjętych kryteriów włączenia i wykluczenia. Uzyskane wyniki potwierdzają ogólnie pozytywny wpływ technik teatralnych na nauczanie języka, choć jednocześnie ujawniają istotne ograniczenia i wskazują na potrzebę prowadzenia bardziej rygorystycznych badań

empirycznych. Uwzględniając te luki, niniejszy przegląd dostarcza wartościowych spostrzeżeń i wytycza kierunki przyszłych badań, których celem jest poszerzenie podstaw empirycznych oraz umocnienie pozycji działań teatralnych jako metody w dydaktyce języka angielskiego.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: nauczanie oparte na dramie, nauczanie języka angielskiego jako obcego na poziomie szkolnictwa wyższego, badania eksperymentalne, interwencja z wykorzystaniem dramy.

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