Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching

ISSN: 1750-1229 (Print) 1750-1237 (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/rill20

Developing young language learners' oral language through drama: a systematic review

Faidra Faitaki, Sophie Liggins, Junying Li & Xiaoying Wu

To cite this article: Faidra Faitaki, Sophie Liggins, Junying Li & Xiaoying Wu (17 Mar 2026): Developing young language learners' oral language through drama: a systematic review, Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching, DOI: 10.1080/17501229.2026.2642400

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/17501229.2026.2642400

Published online: 17 Mar 2026.

INNOVATION IN LANGUAGE LEARNING AND TEACHING
https://doi.org/10.1080/17501229.2026.2642400

REVIEW ARTICLE

OPEN ACCESS Check for updates

Developing young language learners' oral language through drama: a systematic review

Faidra Faitaki, Sophie Liggins*, Junying Li* and Xiaoying Wu

Department of Education, University of Oxford, Oxford, UK

ABSTRACT

Success in literacy relies on the secure development of oral language, particularly for bilingual learners who are known to start school with lower oral language skills than their monolingual peers. Drama-based activities could have beneficial effects on children's second language (L2) development, but the extent and strength of the evidence in favour of this claim has not been evaluated to date. We conducted a systematic review to fill this research gap. After searching for literature, we identified 471 initial records. Following systematic screening and selection, 29 studies that met the inclusion criteria were included for in-depth analysis. We found that the studies were all conducted in the last 25 years; spanned numerous geographical contexts and educational settings; involved children of varied ages and target L2s; used diverse drama pedagogies; and focused on distinct linguistic, psychological and social skills. Despite their differences, all studies reported positive effects of drama on children's development of oral language and socio-affective skills in the L2. However, most studies were not able to give rise to unbiased conclusions regarding the effectiveness of drama as a pedagogical approach because of their design and reporting omissions. Based on our findings, we suggest that drama-based education programmes seem to have the potential to develop young L2 learners' oral language and communication skills. However, more studies – involving more robust methods and more thorough reporting – are needed to draw firmer conclusions about the effectiveness of the approach.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 4 November 2025
Accepted 1 March 2026

KEYWORDS
Drama; performative language teaching; oral language; second language learning; young learners

1. Introduction

Drama is believed to be a useful pedagogical approach as it can foster an ideal interaction context for children's linguistic, psychological, and social development (Lee et al. 2015). The medium can be particularly valuable when it comes to language learning: learning a language involves picking up skills, strategies and values associated with the target

CONTACT Faidra Faitaki faidra.faitaki@education.ox.ac.uk Department of Education, University of Oxford, 15 Norham Gardens, OX2 6PY Oxford, UK
*Author Sophie Liggins is currently working at University College London and author Junying Li is currently working at the British Museum.

second language (L2); using drama activities can help create an engaging environment, where children can use and, thus, develop their communicative skills (Winston 2022). Moreover, the socio-emotional benefits that drama confers might be useful in making language lessons more enjoyable and less stressful – not least for young language learners, who are learning an L2 during the formative years of (pre-)primary school (Winston 2022).

Given its potential benefits, drama activities can form part of classroom practice, and there is an abundance of resources aimed at supporting and inspiring teachers to use drama (Belliveau and Kim 2013). Yet, there seems to be a dearth of research evaluating the effectiveness of drama as a language learning approach. Belliveau and Kim's (2013) systematic review of the literature on the topic found 30 empirical studies, most of which concerned learners in secondary and tertiary education. Although the review established positive effects of drama on language learning and communication abilities, the differential effects of using drama across age groups or relative to other pedagogical approaches were not explored. Moreover, the potential bias of the included studies was not evaluated.

1.1. Oral language, communication, and affective dispositions

One L2 domain that drama seems well-suited to developing is oral language. Oral language is a multifaceted construct which encompasses a range of skills, including listening comprehension, phonological fluency, as well as receptive and productive vocabulary. Children's oral language at the earliest stages of education is known to predict their literacy skills later on – a finding that holds for monolingual and bilingual children alike (Bowyer-Crane et al. 2017). Indeed, according to influential theories like the Simple View of Reading (Gough and Tunmer 1986), reading comprehension is achieved through the combination of oral language and decoding skills. Therefore, oral language is a domain that should be targeted for intervention – particularly among young language learners who are often found to lag behind their monolingual peers in terms of oral language skills (Bowyer-Crane et al. 2017). Drama activities can be particularly useful for developing oral language because they can be designed to involve few to no words if children's receptive and/or productive abilities are limited (Winston 2022) and to tackle specific linguistic domains, such as vocabulary or comprehension (Faitaki and Murphy 2022).

The fact that drama activities are often completed in groups can also help children develop their communication, collaboration, and socialisation abilities. At the same time, such activities can increase students' confidence and foster a sense of belonging (Price and Ansong 2018). These 'peripheral' abilities and experiences might be important for language development (Faitaki, Liggins, and Murphy 2025).

1.2. Drama and learner categories

But what do we mean by 'drama'? It can be observed that different operationalisations of the term can be found in academic literature and everyday practice (Belliveau and Kim 2013). For instance, doing 'drama' at school might involve engaging in role-play in class or participating in an after-school drama club. Sometimes, the activities are administered in a standalone fashion, while other times they culminate in a performance. These differences in operationalisation can make comparisons between studies difficult.

In addition, there are different categories of language learners that drama might affect in different ways. Most studies conducted to date focus on learners who pick up an L2, most often English, at school (Belliveau and Kim 2013). By contrast, a few studies focus on minority language learners. The term 'minority language learners' captures a diverse group, whose members have different amounts of exposure to and proficiency in both their home language and target language (Murphy 2014). These individual differences make this population challenging for researchers to investigate and for practitioners to teach – not least in the context of using drama-based activities, which need to be tailored to pupils' linguistic level in order to be successful (Faitaki and Murphy 2022).

1.3. Objectives and research questions

The aim of this project was to conduct a systematic review in order 'to locate, appraise and synthesise the best available evidence' (Boland, Cherry, and Dickson 2017, 2) on the effects of drama on the linguistic, social and psychological development of young L2 learners – an endeavour that, to our knowledge, has not been undertaken before for this population. This represents an important innovation given that existing studies are dispersed across disciplines. Given the fragmented and diverse nature of the existing literature, a systematic review was deemed to offer a transparent and rigorous means of evaluating the evidence base in this emerging field (Boland, Cherry, and Dickson 2017). We decided to keep the scope, including research from all contexts where learners might be learning an additional/foreign language at a young age (defined here as pre-primary and primary school). Three main questions guided our review:

1. What is the extent and nature of the research examining drama-based approaches to improving oral language in children who are learning an additional/foreign language at (pre-)primary school?
2. What are the reported effects of drama on children's oral language in the target language?
3. What is the strength of the evidence presented in this research?

2. Methodology

2.1. Protocol registration

This review was conducted by a team based in an institution that places high value on research synthesis. Thus, before starting our review, we registered our protocol on the International Database of Systematic Reviews (IDESR.org) [Registration Number: IDESR000048; Faitaki and Liggins 2022] and we followed the Synthesis Methods and Reporting Tool (SMART; Chong 2025) guidelines for reporting in the following sections.

2.2. Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Inclusion and exclusion criteria are important for ensuring transparency and allowing replicability (Siddaway, Wood, and Hedges 2019). We established 10 inclusion and exclusion criteria to identify studies relevant to our research questions (Table 1). Studies that did not meet these criteria were excluded from the review.

Table 1. Inclusion criteria & rationale.

Category	Inclusion Criteria	Rationale
Reference	Include: Studies with a full reference or sufficient information. Exclude: Studies with insufficient bibliographic information.	Without sufficient bibliographic information, the retrieval of works is not feasible.
Publication date	Include: Studies published on any date.	We wanted to collect all of the available evidence.
Participant's age	Include: Studies involving children aged between 4 and 12. Exclude: Studies involving children under the age of 4 and over the age of 12.	We wanted to focus on primary school learners. We used 4–12 to accommodate differences in primary school ages across the world.
Participant's language background	Include: Studies involving children learning any language as an 'additional' language.	We wanted to explore oral language development in an additional (including a second or foreign) language. We did not target a specific additional language.
Participant's development	Include: Studies on typically developing young learners. Exclude: Studies that exclusively target non-typically developing learners.	The findings of non-typically developing populations may not generalise to the population.
Intervention medium	Include: Studies conducted in learning environments (e.g. classrooms, extra-curricular activities or clubs) with a focus on drama. Exclude: Studies where no particular emphasis is put on using drama (e.g. reading or storytelling only).	We focus on the effects of using drama as a pedagogical tool, the intervention must include developing oral language through drama in a learning environment.
Outcome	Include: Studies that report the effects of drama on oral language development and socioemotional factors. Exclude: Systematic reviews or studies that provide a narrative evaluation of an intervention but no outcome measures.	Concrete data are essential for a synthesis of findings in this field of literature.
Study design	Include: All studies, regardless of their design (quantitative or qualitative).	Excluding one type of study design risks systematically neglecting a body of research and narrowing the scope of this review.
Publication status	Include: All studies, regardless of their publication status.	We sought to offset potential publication bias by including grey literature.
Publication language	Include: Studies published in Chinese, English, French, Greek, and Spanish.	Limiting this review to studies published in English may result in a systematic neglect of a particular body of research. We tried to include as many languages of publication as possible, based on the linguistic abilities of the research team.

2.3. Search strategy

A subject librarian was consulted to formulate the initial search. Four elements were agreed on as the main search fields/variables: education level, language background, intervention medium and linguistic outcomes. Database searches were carried out on Web of Science, ProQuest, Scopus and EThOS. We searched on the 'abstracts' frame, as piloting indicated that it gave rise to the most relevant results. We used the string presented in Table 2.

In addition to the bibliographic database searches, manual searches were carried out to identify potential articles of interest. Firstly, we looked in *Scenario: A Journal for Performative Teaching, Learning, Research*, which focuses on the role of drama in the teaching and learning of foreign and/or second languages. We read the abstract of every article in the journal (excluding forwards, reviews, reports, or announcements) to see if it met

Table 2. Search string.

Field	Search terms
Intervention medium	drama OR theatre OR 'story telling' OR story-telling OR acting OR role-play OR 'role play'
Language background	EAL OR 'English as an additional language' OR 'additional language' OR 'second language' OR 'third language' OR 'minority language' OR 'heritage language' OR 'community language' OR MFL OR 'foreign language'
Education level	Children OR school OR 'early years' OR preschool OR 'primary school' OR KS1 OR 'key stage 1'
Outcome	'Oral language' OR 'speaking skills' OR 'spoken language' OR vocabulary OR range OR 'conversation skills' OR oracy OR 'expressive language' OR 'expressive vocabulary' OR 'productive language' OR confidence OR wellbeing OR well-being OR 'well?being' OR anxiety

Note: the different fields were connected with the Boolean operator AND in journal searches.

our criteria. Secondly, we hand-searched the websites of relevant organisations – the Bell Foundation, the National Association for Language Development in the Curriculum (NALDIC), and the Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research (CILT) – to locate other relevant publications. Finally, we searched the bibliography of Belliveau and Kim (2013), which, to our knowledge, is the only review of studies on drama and oral language development to date. We also reviewed major discussion papers to uncover studies that have not been listed in electronic databases (Petticrew and Roberts 2006).

In order to ensure that we were not missing unpublished work or publications in outlets that were not indexed in the databases we searched in, we contacted a small selection of authors who had published widely in the field. These included several academics who taught on different drama and language teaching programmes across the world.

2.4. Screening

The initial database search, conducted in December 2022, identified a total of 401 eligible studies: 237 from databases and 164 from *Scenario*. Of the 237 records retrieved from database searches, 62 were from the Web of Science (WoS) Core Collection, 89 from the ProQuest Social Science Premium Collection, 45 from SCOPUS, 37 from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, and 4 from EThOS. After removing 51 duplicate records, 186 records remained for screening.

A further 164 relevant articles were located in *Scenario*. Of these, 106 were written in English, while 58 were written in German. German-written articles had to be excluded due to the research team's resource limitations – a limitation that we return to in the Discussion. Of the English articles, 62 were excluded due to focusing on an inappropriate population (i.e. children who were not learning an additional/foreign language or who were over the target age bracket), and 35 were excluded because they did not involve an intervention or because they involved an intervention with inappropriate objectives. As such, a further 9 articles were selected for full-text screening.

No articles of interest were found on the various organisations' websites. Moreover, our citation-chaining using Belliveau and Kim's (2013) systematic review revealed no relevant references other than those that had already come up during the manual search of Scenario. The majority of the studies discussed in the review involved university-level students, and the other references were practical guides or theoretical commentaries on the topic. Furthermore, we received no answers from the researchers that we contacted.

To update the review, a search was conducted in March 2025 following the same parameters as the original search – this time, spanning the period January 2023 to March 2025. This identified 70 additional works: 38 from the WoS Core Collection, 12 from the ProQuest Social Science Premium Collection, and 20 from SCOPUS. After removing 18 duplicate records, 52 were included for screening.

2.4.1. Piloting

Prior to screening all results, we piloted our screening and selection process as advised in Boland, Cherry, and Dickson (2017), to ensure that both reviewers (who were the second and third author in the 2022 iteration) fully understood the type of studies to be included in the review. We randomly selected 20 titles and abstracts of studies identified by the main search to blind-screen on Rayyan. We used the inclusion/exclusion criteria to screen the titles and abstracts. Interrater reliability was high (90%). Small discrepancies in the two reviewers' results highlighted the need for more nuanced distinctions on certain terms, such as 'sociodramatic play'. The research team discussed what constitutes 'drama-based activities', and developed a list of example terms to include when searching for drama – based activities. The list included drama, theatre, acting, storytelling, sociodramatic play, role-play and performance. The final screening tool (Table 3) was thus devised. This screening tool was also used in the 2025 update.

2.4.2. First-Level screening

After the completion of piloting, the same two authors independently screened the titles and abstracts of all studies by applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria to the title and abstract in order to determine whether the study appeared relevant to our review questions (Boland, Cherry, and Dickson 2017). Screening was recorded on Rayyan, a web-based application for systematic reviews (Ouzzani et al. 2016). Interrater reliability was, once again, high at 85%. All discrepancies were discussed until an agreement was reached. Of the 195 initial papers screened in the 2022 search, 79 were excluded, leaving 116 studies included for full-text screening.

For the 2025 update, the first author screened the titles and abstracts of all studies adhering to the original criteria. On this occasion, intra-rater reliability was established

Table 3. Screening tool.

Criterion	Label for Exclusion
1. Is the intervention substantially about drama and theatre? This could refer to one or more of the following: drama, theatre, acting, storytelling, sociodramatic play, role-play, performance.	Not drama
2. Does the study include the right population? This should refer to all of the following: a. Children aged 4-12; b. Learners of any language as an additional language; c. Typically developing.	Wrong population
3. Does the study measure oral language as a primary outcome? This could refer to one or more of the following: oral language production, comprehension, body language, attitudes, anxiety, self-confidence, well-being, and self-expression.	Not oral language
4. Does the article collect data (qualitative or quantitative)?	Not empirical
5. Is the article in Chinese, English, French, Greek or Spanish?	Wrong language
6. Is the article available? (To be judged at the stage of full-text screening)	Not found OR not accessible.

(with the author repeating the screening process after a one-month interval). The agreement between the two timepoints was 96.2%. Of the 52 new papers located in the 2025 update, 38 were excluded, while 14 were included for full-text screening (including the two papers that had caused a discrepancy in the intra-rater reliability calculation).

2.4.3. Second-Level screening

Once we had completed the screening of titles and abstracts, we obtained copies of the papers we marked for possible inclusion in the review (Boland, Cherry, and Dickson 2017). We searched for all papers electronically and, in the instances that they were not available, we used the British Library collection, the University of Oxford inter-library loans system and contacted relevant authors. Despite trying all of these routes, the full-text versions of 19 publications remained unavailable in the 2022 search, so they had to be excluded from the full-text screening. No such issues emerged in the 2025 update.

The authors carefully read each full-text paper and used the screening tool to make decisions on which citations would be included and which would be excluded. Reasons for exclusion in the 2022 search, other than not being available (N = 19), were wrong population[1] (N = 30), not empirical (N = 22), not drama (N = 12), not additional language (N = 3), background texts (N = 3), not oral language (N = 3), and wrong language (N = 1). In the 2025 update search, 9 studies were excluded due to wrong population (N = 4), not oral language (N = 2), not empirical (N = 1), background text (N = 1), and not effectiveness (N = 1). On some occasions, citations were excluded for more than one reason. Once the inappropriate records were excluded, we were left with 29 citations to extract data from and include in the review in total. The process of identifying suitable studies is visualised in Figure 1.

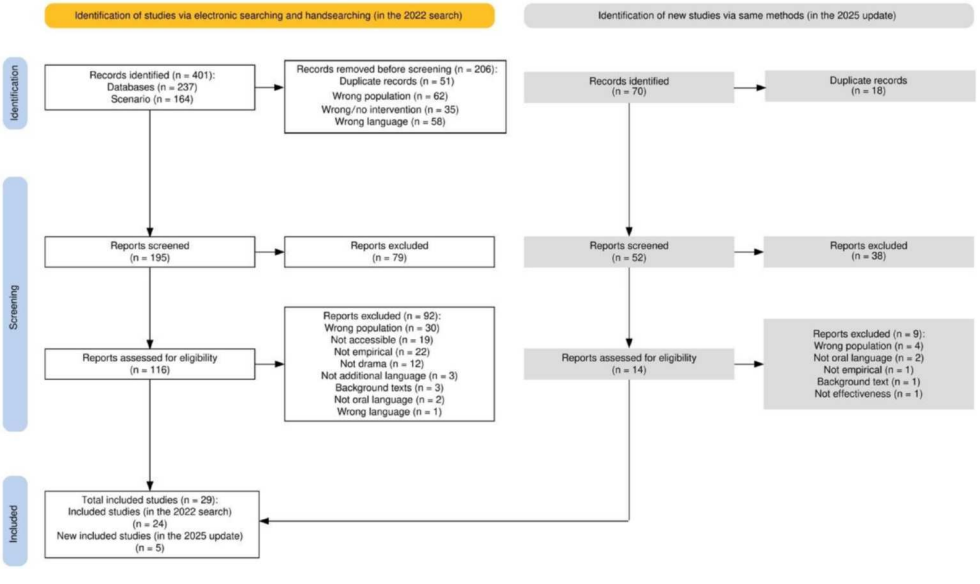

Figure 1. Identification of Included Studies.

2.5. Data extraction

We adapted the data extraction form developed by Hamilton et al. (2024), whose review investigated the effectiveness of using songs with child foreign language learners. Given the fact that the form had been piloted by Hamilton et al. (2024), we resolved not to re-assess its reliability. However, the second and third authors independently trialled the data extraction form with a subset of the included sources (i.e. two each). Based on their feedback, minor changes were made: it was decided that some categories on the form were not necessary for our review and were thus removed. Some other categories (e.g. 'Drama-Based Pedagogies') and subcategories were added. The final version of the adapted form was also used in the 2025 iteration.

2.6. Study appraisal

To appraise the included studies, the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT; Hong et al. 2018) was used. The MMAT is a useful quality appraisal instrument for systematic reviews which synthesise studies with different methodologies, since it can assess different research designs (qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods). While most designs are judged based on 5 categories, mixed methods studies are judged based on 15, as the criteria for qualitative and quantitative studies also need to be considered. We scored the studies using the MMAT tool, but in line with Hong et al.'s (2018) recommendations, we also used narrative judgments to identify potential sources of bias in the included studies, focusing on: confounding, control groups, participant selection, measurement selection, and reporting omissions. In the 2022 iteration of the review, quality appraisal was carried out by the second and third authors, who reviewed 12 studies each. No interrater reliability was established per se; however, any studies that caused uncertainty were flagged and reviewed by the other author (second or third, depending on who it was that had raised the issue). The studies, and the corresponding MMAT categorisations, were subsequently discussed in a team meeting in order to ensure that the scores were accurate and ratified by all team members. This process was followed for five studies (i.e. 20.83% of the dataset). In the 2025 iteration, quality appraisal was carried out by the fourth author. There were no uncertainties raised.

3. Findings

To answer our first research question ('What is the extent and nature of the research examining drama-based approaches to improving oral language in children who are learning an additional/foreign language at (pre-)primary school?'), we looked at three main dimensions that shape the research on the topic: the characteristics of the population(s), the contexts, and the educational settings. The second research question ('What are the reported effects of drama on children's oral language in the target language?') was answered by looking at the linguistic, as well as the social and emotional effects of participating in drama activities. Finally, the third research question ('What is the strength of evidence of this research?') was addressed by looking at the evaluation of the studies through the MMAT.

3.1. Demographic characteristics

In total, 1112 participants took part in the 29 studies that were included in the review. To describe and better understand the participants, this section focuses on three characteristics: age, gender and the participants' L1 and L2.

3.1.1. Participant age

Nearly half of the studies (N = 14) focused on upper primary-aged children (9–12 years), while approximately one-third (N = 10) targeted the early years and lower primary (4–8 years). Three studies spanned from early years through upper primary (4–12 years), and two studies extended into upper primary and older groups (9–12 + years). Some studies (e.g. Allder 2023; Güngör, 2020; Song 2012) involved younger children, though few focused on pre-primary school pupils – an observation that highlights the need for further research on the effectiveness of performative language teaching methods with this population. For detailed information, see Appendix 1.

3.1.2. Participant gender

Gender was reported for 75.72% of the participants (N = 842), suggesting that the information is not provided for the remaining 24.28% (N = 270). Of the 842 participants for whom gender was reported, there were 58.91% girls (N = 496) and 41.09% boys (N = 346), demonstrating good gender balance across studies (see Appendix 2).

3.1.3. Focal languages

Across the 29 studies, 23 reported participants' L1s, accounting for a total of 1,009 participants. The remaining six studies did not explicitly report participants' L1s (this amounts to N = 103 participants); however, most of these studies were described as involving participants with mixed L1s. Among the explicitly reported L1s, the most frequently represented languages were English, Turkish, Chinese, Korean, and Farsi/Persian. Other reported languages included German, Thai, Russian, Spanish, Syrian-origin (Arabic and Kurdish), Greek, Arabic, Lithuanian, Polish, and Bengali. This information is visualised in Figure 2. For a detailed breakdown, see Appendix 3.

Regarding the distribution of reported L2s, the majority of participants reported English as their L2, followed by German, French, and Welsh. 20 participants reported having both English and Greek as L2s. 48 participants were identified as monolingual English speakers with no reported L2. This distribution, illustrated in Figure 3, reflects the dominance of English as a second/foreign/additional language (ESL/EFL/EAL) across the dataset.

3.2. Research contexts

This section outlines the research contexts of the 29 reviewed studies, including their geographical locations, the educational settings in which the research was conducted, and publication trends.

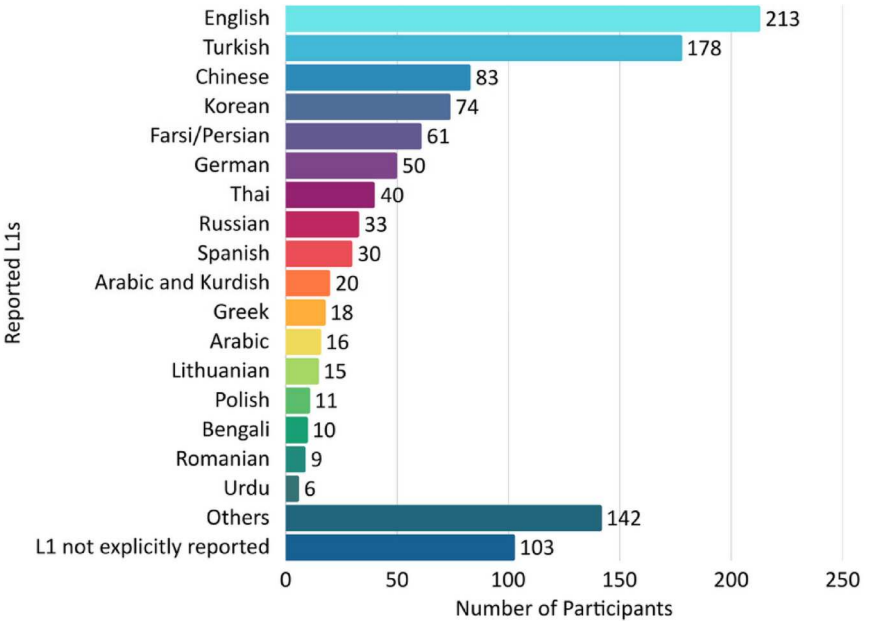

Figure 2. Reported L1s. Note: 'Others' includes: Albanian, Bulgarian, French, Burmese, Romany, Swahili, and Yoruba (N = 2 participants each; total N = 14 participants), and Hindi, Hungarian, Italian, Lingala, Malayam, Pashto, Portuguese, and languages from Burundi, Congo, North Macedonia, and Sudan (N = 1 participant each; total N = 11 participants). An additional 117 participants spoke 24 different family languages not individually reported in Stanat et al. (2012).

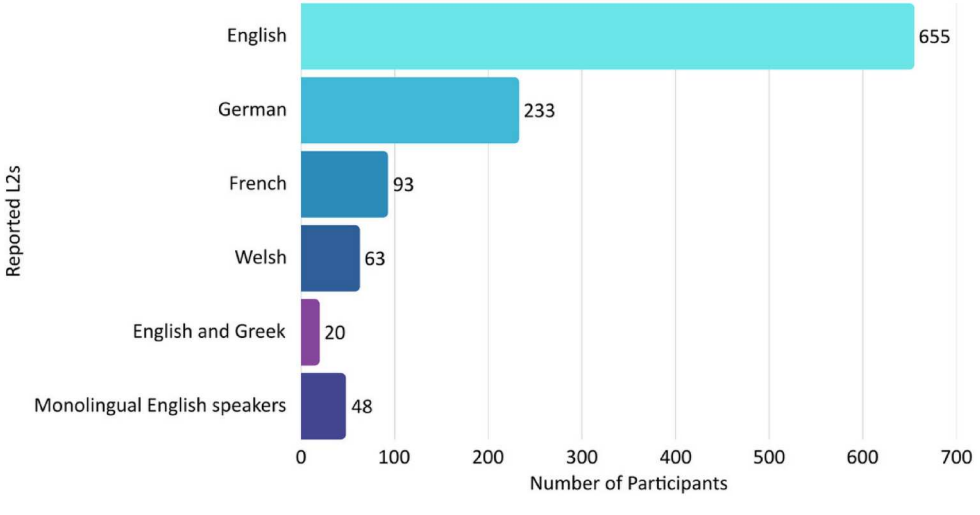

Figure 3. Reported L2s.

3.2.1. Geographical locations

The 29 included studies were conducted across 13 countries and regions (see Appendix 4). As can be observed in Figure 4, most studies were conducted in the UK, perhaps

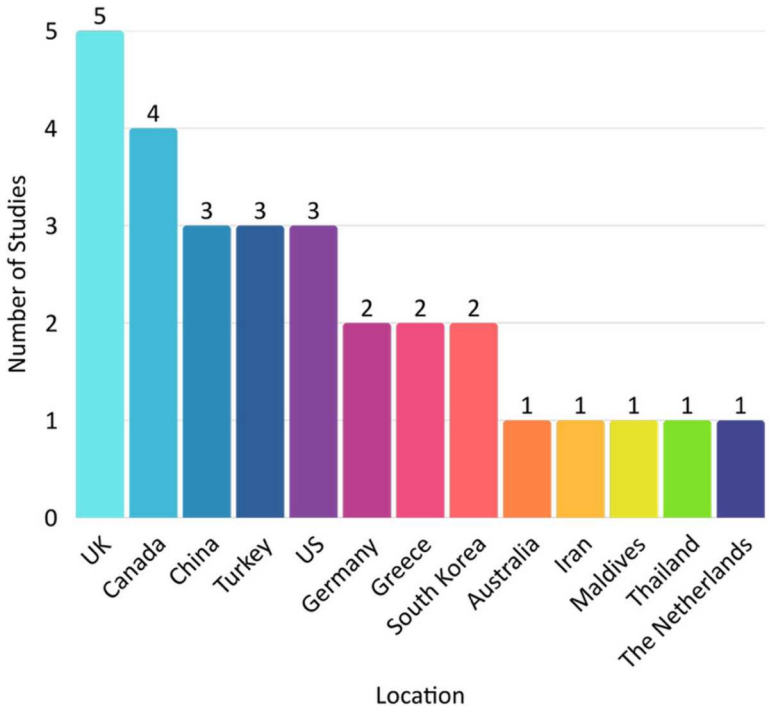

Figure 4. Locations of Studies.

responding to calls for more research in this context (Murphy and Unthiah 2015). This was followed by Canada, China, Turkey, and the US; Germany, Greece, and South Korea; Australia, Iran, Maldives, Thailand, and the Netherlands.

3.3.2. Educational settings

The 29 studies were conducted across a range of educational settings (see Appendix 5). Figure 5 shows that the majority were carried out in formal school settings (e.g. mainstream, international schools) with ESL/EFL/EAL support. Other settings included after-school or extracurricular drama club, summer school, language school, refugee camp, and drama-integrated programmes.

3.3.3. Publication trends

Figure 6 shows the publication trend from 2005 to 2025. The earliest study identified was Coleman (2005). Early output was sporadic, with peaks in 2007 and 2019 (N = 3 each). Since 2011, publication has become more consistent, averaging 1–2 studies per year, indicating a steady but modest research interest in recent years.

Regarding the publication types, journal articles were the most common, followed by doctoral theses, master's theses, and book chapters. This is illustrated in Figure 7. It is interesting to note that almost half of the records identified (N = 12 or 42.9%) correspond to unpublished Master's or PhD theses, reflecting the importance of including grey literature in the search so as to capture otherwise unpublished relevant work.

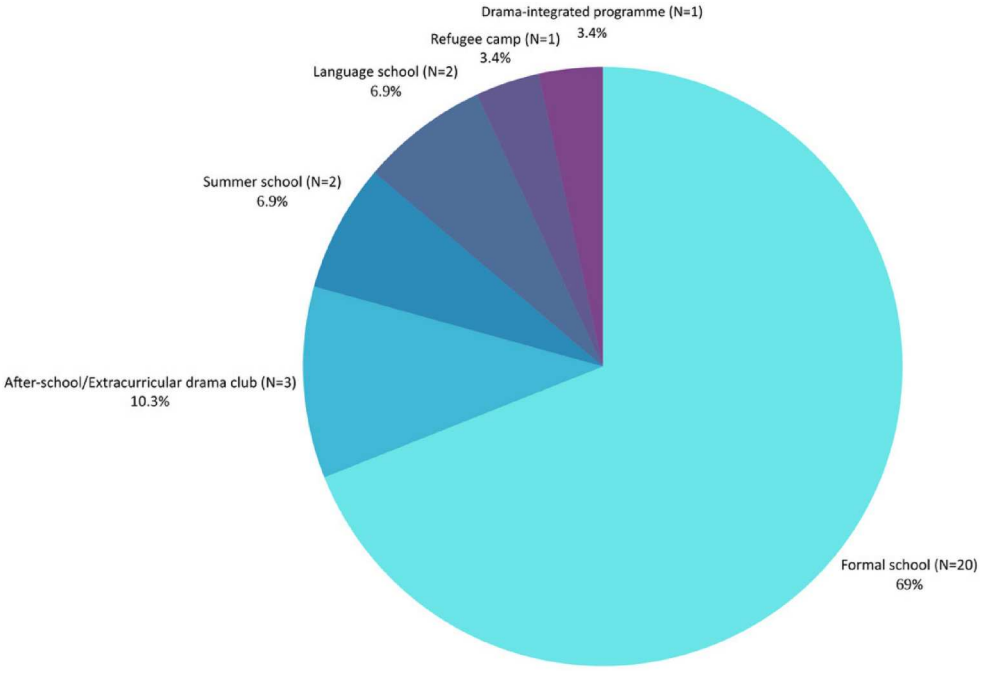

Figure 5. Educational Settings.

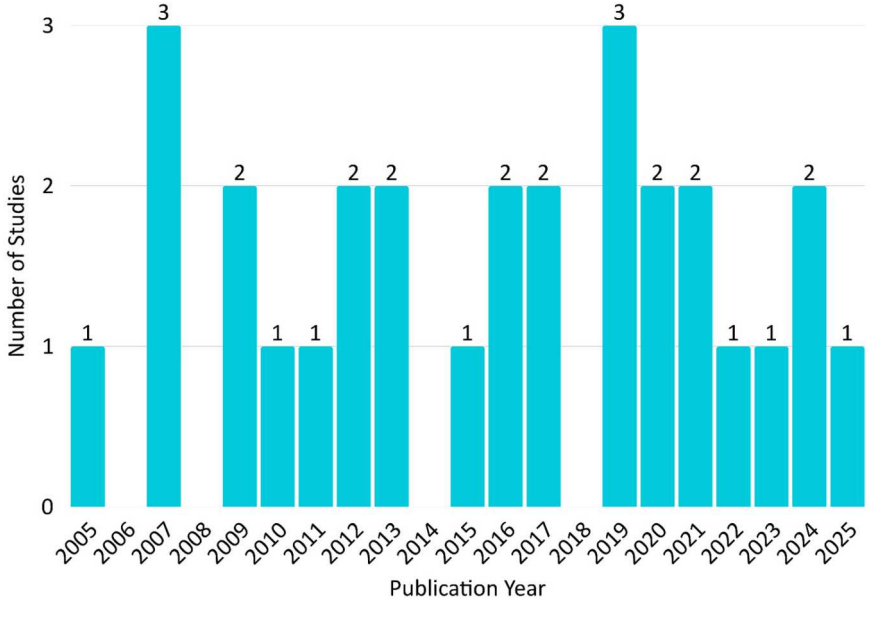

Figure 6. Publication Year.

3.3. Methodological characteristics

This section reports the forms of drama-based pedagogies employed in the included studies, the duration of drama-based intervention, and their comparison conditions.

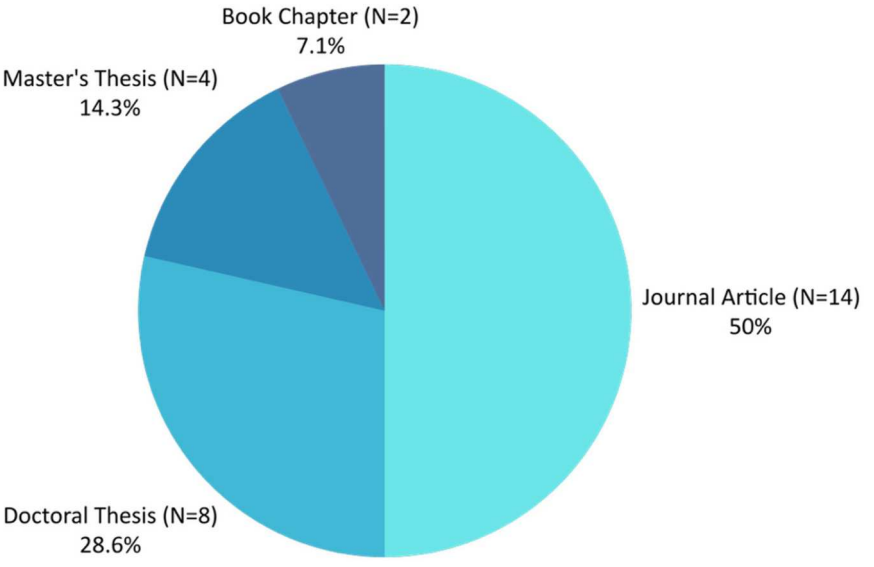

Figure 7. Publication Type.

3.3.1. Drama-Based pedagogies

Figure 8 lists the main categories we developed to categorise the forms of drama we encountered in the included studies (Appendix 6 contains a detailed breakdown, as well as a detailed description of what the drama intervention reported in each study involved). It can be observed that the most common category in the sample was extra-curricular drama activities (e.g. Kalogirou, 2016; Wager et al., 2009), followed by drama activities as part of the curriculum (e.g. Chang, 2009; Güngor, 2020; Kara, 2022), process

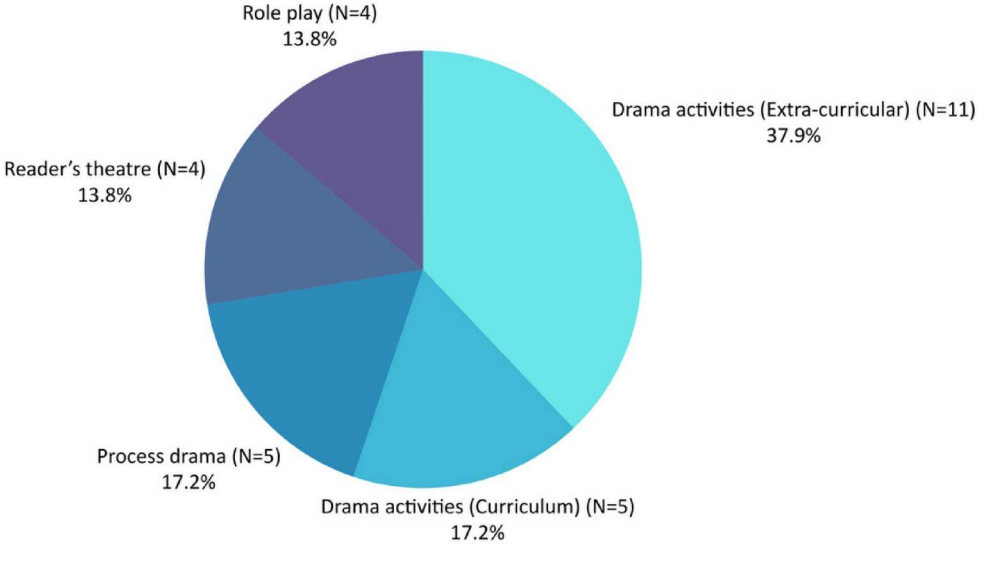

Figure 8. Intervention Categories.

drama (e.g. Allder, 2023; Bournot-Trites et al., 2007), and readers' theatre (e.g. Gu & Lornklang, 2021; Mansouri & Darani, 2016). Readers' theatre involves students reading and rehearsing scripted texts for performance without memorisation, staging, or costumes. Process drama refers to improvised, teacher-guided dramatic exploration during which participants collaboratively enact and reflect on an imagined scenario without a fixed script or performance outcome.

3.3.2. Intervention duration

An important component for the success of an intervention is its duration – with longer-lasting interventions giving rise to more pronounced effects (Faitaki, Liggins, and Murphy 2025). However, 'duration' can be operationalised in different ways. In Table 4, we summarise the intervention duration by reporting the length of intervention, frequency (sessions per week), session duration (minutes per session), and total contact times (converted to hours and minutes when possible).

23 studies reported intervention length, and most of them (N = 18) specified or could be converted to weeks. The duration of intervention in weeks ranged from 1 to 19 weeks. Five studies reported duration in other forms (i.e. 4 units, 1, 3 months, 7 lessons, and 8 times), and 6 studies did not specify this information. Frequency of contact was reported in 21 studies, ranging from once weekly to 4–5 times per week. Frequency was unclear in 8 studies. Session duration was reported in 11 studies, ranging from 30 to 120 min. The intervention duration was unclear in 18 studies. Only 10 studies provided sufficient information to calculate total contact time in hours and minutes, ranging from 7 h 30 min to 36 h. The median contact time was approximately 16 h. For more detailed information, review Appendix 7.

3.3.3. Comparison groups

Among the 29 studies, 14 included a control group, while 15 lacked or provided insufficient information on comparison conditions. Control groups typically followed traditional,

Table 4. Intervention duration.

Intervention Duration	Number of Studies
Length of Intervention	
1–4 weeks	3
5–8 weeks	7
9–12 weeks	4
13 weeks or more	4
Others (e.g. reported as units, months, lessons, times)	5
Unclear	6
Frequency (sessions per week)	
1/week	11
2–3 times/week	5
4–5 times/week	5
Unclear	8
Session Duration (minutes per session)	
Less than 60 min	7
60 min to 120 min	4
Unclear	18
Total Contact Times (converted to hours and minutes when possible)	
Less than 10 h	2
10 h to 36 h	8
Unclear	19

non-drama-based teaching or participated in non-language extra-curricular activities (see Appendix 8).

Most control groups employed conventional methods, such as paper-based, teacher-centred instruction (Allder 2023), lecture-style teaching (Bournot-Trites et al. 2007), regular English classes (Mansouri and Darani 2016; Turgut 2019), or conventional reading instruction (Coleman 2005). In Allder (2023), the control group covered the same English curriculum as the drama intervention group, but the content was delivered through teacher-centred instruction with minimal movement and limited oral interaction (e.g. PowerPoint presentations, direct explanations, worksheets, and individual written tasks), focusing on grammar and spelling. Likewise, in Güngör (2020) and Kalogirou, Beauchamp, and Whyte (2019), while the experimental group engaged in communicative drama-based activities, the control group was instructed via traditional methods such as repetition, memorisation, flashcard-based activities, slide presentations or textbook tasks.

Another type of comparison involved drama interventions versus non-language extra-curricular activities. For example, the control group in Faitaki, Liggins, and Murphy (2025) participated in other extra-curricular clubs such as swimming and dancing, while Song (2012) used drawing as the comparison condition.

Some studies compared drama with non-drama phases within the same group or by alternating activity orders. For example, in Giaitzis (2007), students engaged in eight weeks of traditional instruction (e.g. oral questioning, copying key points, cassette-based listening, and worksheet completion) followed by eight weeks of drama intervention. Song (2012) varied the order of drawing and drama tasks, while Sachasiri and Eamoraphan (2017) implemented four weeks of role-play followed by four weeks of communication games.

3.4. Main effects reported

We divided the widely varied outcomes that we encountered in the research into three broad categories: language-related outcomes, psychological outcomes and social outcomes. Despite one of our inclusion criteria being that the study measures oral language as a primary outcome, studies that measured psychological or social outcomes were included in the review as they covered elements that we consider to be part of oral language development. It is worth noting that most studies' outcomes overlapped between the three categories.

3.4.1. Linguistic outcomes

We use 'language-related' outcomes to refer to any outcomes that concern speaking, vocabulary, writing, listening, comprehension, fluency, grammar, non-verbal communication, communication (roughly defined here as interaction) and language use (defined here as language registers and styles, language acquisition skills, oral interaction and self-expression). It is worth highlighting that our outcome categorisation was determined by the operationalisations or the information provided in the studies themselves; however, the operationalisations were not always consistent or characterised by the same level of granularity. For instance, the definition of 'communication' often has a sociolinguistic dimension (see Vitsou and Papadopoulou 2020) but varies across studies

and might overlap with some aspects of language use (e.g. interaction, language(s) used, involvement).

As Figure 9 shows, vocabulary was the most frequently reported outcome. It was followed by language use, communication, comprehension, speaking, fluency, grammar, listening, writing, non-verbal communication, accuracy, complexity, and reading.

Vocabulary was investigated in 14 studies, 11 of which reported positive impacts of different types of drama-based pedagogies in developing participants' vocabulary, and three reported a null effect (see Appendix 9 for all outcomes). For example, Cushman (2011) found that participants' vocabulary improved after an intervention focusing on embodied ways of understanding. As observed by the researcher, access to multimodal forms of communication appeared to have a positive impact on literary awareness and vocabulary by providing space to inquire about language and misunderstandings – thus supporting learners to show higher-order thinking in complex texts and language. Sachasiri and Eamoraphan (2017) also saw larger gains in participants' vocabulary knowledge when role-play activities were preceded by communication games. Likewise, Mansouri and Darani (2016) found that learners' vocabulary knowledge was positively affected after seven units of exposure to the reader's theatre. However, Faitaki, Liggins, and Murphy (2025), Song (2012), and Stanat et al. (2012) found no significant effects of the intervention on vocabulary.

Most of the other linguistic outcomes were also reported to have been positively affected by various types of drama-based activities. Vitsou and Papadopoulou (2020)

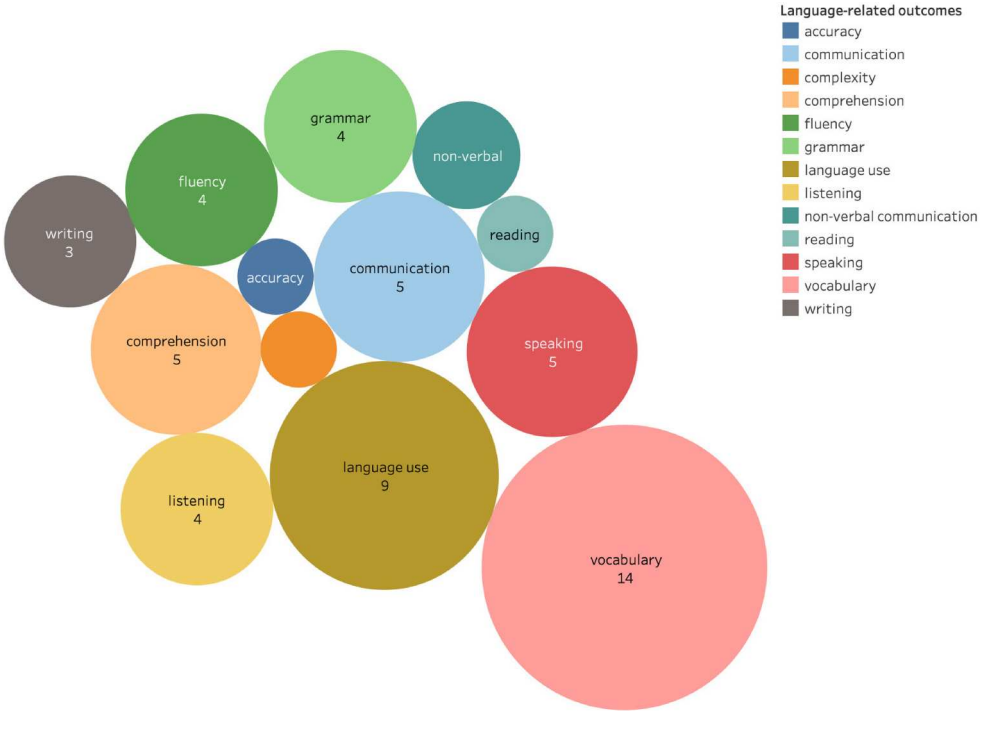

Figure 9. Linguistic Outcomes. Note: The number in each circle/the size of the circle indicates the reported frequency. The colours demonstrate different constructs.

observed that refugee children's oral language use improved after 11 weeks of drama activities. Stanat et al. (2012) used a bespoke grammar test, a reading test and a vocabulary test to examine the effectiveness of the intervention reported in the study and found higher scores amongst the treatment groups, particularly on reading and grammar, despite the fact that the authors had found no significant effects of the intervention on vocabulary. In Guilfoyle and Mistry (2013), speaking and listening skills are observed to improve for pupils with EAL in the Foundation Stage, supported by the implementation of role-play activities.

3.4.2. Psychological outcomes

In terms of psychological outcomes, motivation was the one most frequently reported. This was followed by confidence, anxiety, positive attitudes, enjoyment, learner autonomy, self-regulation, sense of agency, and sense of empowerment, as visualised in Figure 10.

The use of drama-based activities was consistently associated with increased learner motivation, confidence, enjoyment and positive attitudes towards language learning. Bournot-Trites et al. (2007), for example, found that participation in drama activities significantly increased learners' motivation in an early elementary French Immersion context. Students in the drama group reported a stronger desire to learn French compared to the control group, and demonstrated higher levels of integrative motivation. Similar outcomes were observed by Giaitzis (2007), who found that drama activities, including role-play and mime, improved motivation and oral communication skills in Junior Core French classes by providing a stimulating, non-threatening environment. In an EFL

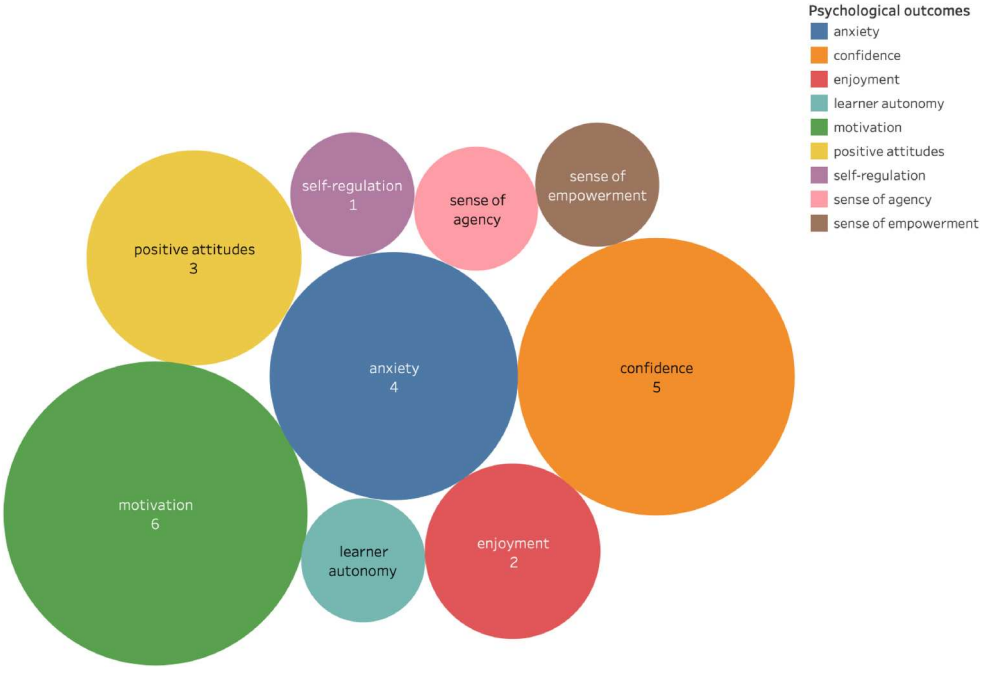

Figure 10. Psychological Outcomes.

context, Lee (2017) found that creative drama in EFL classrooms supported motivation alongside oral language use, confidence, and authentic interaction, making it particularly effective for young language learners. More recently, Allder (2023) reported that children undertaking a drama-based English programme displayed higher motivation, increased confidence, stronger social integration, and improved attitudes towards learning than peers in the comparison group.

Lai (2007) found that children associated process drama with positive feelings, as well as notions of cooperation and togetherness. Similarly, Kalogirou, Beauchamp, and Whyte (2019) reported that almost all pupils in their study described drama lessons as 'extremely enjoyable,' 'cool,' and 'helpful,' with role-play activities such as shopping or having lunch identified as the most popular.

Anxiety was another frequently reported outcome. For instance, Turgut (2019) examined the effects of drama-based instruction on students' English-speaking anxiety. Results showed that drama activities significantly reduced anxiety. Wirag (2024) explored the relationships between drama elements (i.e. role work, acting, reflection, acting feedback, and FL feedback) and foreign language anxiety (FLA). Results showed that role-play and acting were associated with reduced FLA. In contrast, feedback on English language use was associated with increased FLA. Reflection (group discussions on session quality and performance) and acting feedback (guidance on performance technique) had no significant impact on FLA.

3.4.3. Social outcomes

As visualised in Figure 11, engagement or participation was the most frequently reported social outcome. Others included collaboration and cooperation, social interaction, creativity, cultural sensitivity, imagination, leadership, problem-solving skills, and social skills (e.g. patience, respect, contribution).

The findings in this domain were all reported to be positive. McDonnell and O'Boyle (2021), for example, reported increased participation and engagement in class after a 10-week drama intervention. Lai (2007) reported that drama-based activities encouraged cooperative learning by allowing children to learn, share ideas, and experience positive feelings of togetherness. Wager et al. (2009) found an increase in cultural understanding, sense of community and socially responsible behaviour after participating in an after-school drama club.

3.4.4. Mixed outcomes

While the outcomes were categorised into different aspects above, it should be noted that most studies included in our review investigated different categories of outcomes. This highlights the multifaceted nature and pedagogical potential of drama.

Some studies which focused on language-related skills were led to also report on skills that were not explicitly language-related. For example, in Hull (2013), the focus was vocabulary, tone and register. However, the findings suggested an important effect of bilingual storytelling on turn-taking and contributing – giving rise to improved social skills such as patience and respect. Similarly, fluency was the main outcome reported in Centeno (2010), but the researcher also concluded that readers' theatre increased students' engagement and motivation. In a similar fashion, Bundy, Piazzoli, and Dunn

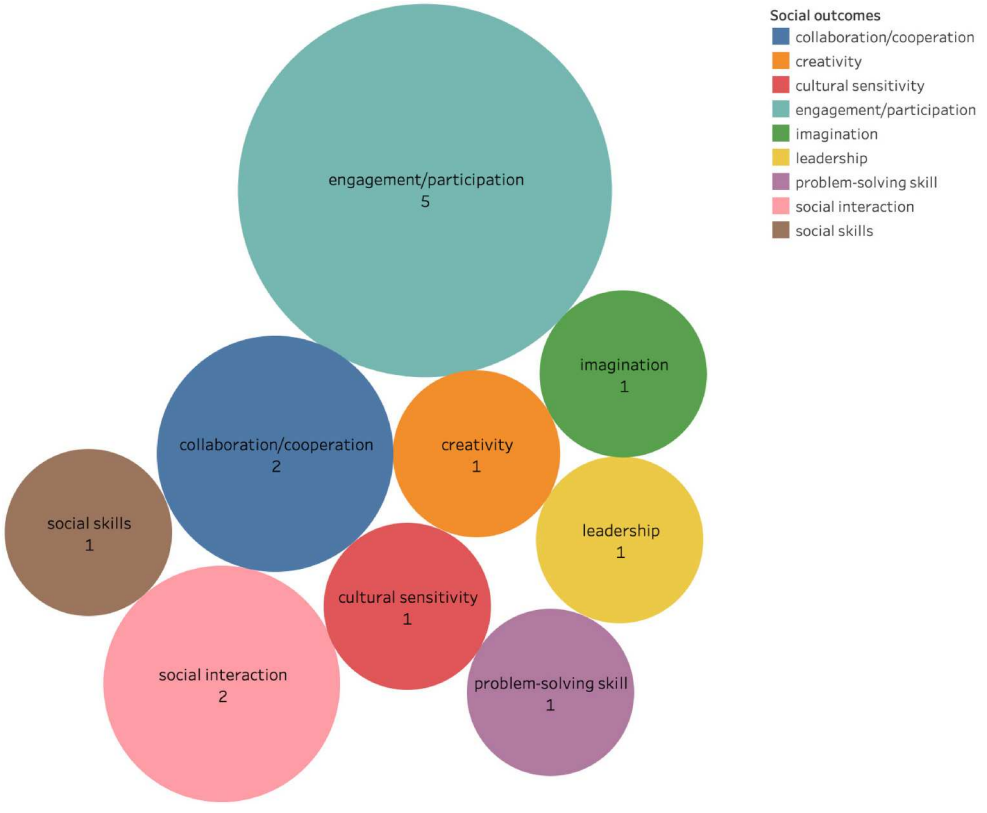

Figure 11. Social Outcomes.

(2015) focused on confidence, engagement and sense of agency in their study but noted growth in the students' language comprehension.

For other studies, looking at various components was part of the intervention design. Bournot-Trites et al. (2007) looked at the impact of drama activities on language learning motivation and cultural sensitivity, as well as second language writing. Likewise, Göksel and Zug (2019) focused on attitudes to learning but also used a writing assignment to look at whether writing performance improved as a result of incorporating drama games and storytelling into French language classes. Likewise, Kalogirou, Beauchamp, and Whyte (2019) investigated the effect of drama teaching techniques on vocabulary acquisition in primary school learners of Welsh. Quantitative findings showed that the experimental groups performed better in three vocabulary acquisition tests (i.e. picture naming, sentence formulation and improvisation tasks). Qualitative findings via questionnaire feedback from the experimental groups revealed high levels of enjoyment, especially for role-play activities.

While drama-based approaches tend to show favourable outcomes across domains, some studies show null effects in some of the investigated areas. For example, in Faitaki, Liggins, and Murphy (2025), quantitative findings based on oral language assessments showed no significant differences in receptive vocabulary and productive vocabulary between the intervention groups and the control group. However,

qualitative findings based on interviews and observations revealed students' increased confidence, self-expression, enjoyment and leadership, as well as reduced anxiety.

3.5. Strength of the evidence

The strength of the evidence was determined by the study designs. Among 29 studies, 20 used qualitative measures, with 11 reporting exclusively qualitative findings. 18 studies used quantitative measures, with 9 reporting solely quantitative findings. 9 studies collected both qualitative and quantitative data (i.e. mixed methods).

We used the MMAT to appraise the methodological quality of included studies. The complete assessment can be found in Appendix 10. As Table 5 shows, mixed methods studies showed a wide range of quality scores. Studies that only reported qualitative findings generally achieved high ratings. There was only one study using the quantitative descriptive design, which was rated 5*****. Studies using a quantitative non-randomised design showed moderate quality, ranging between 4**** (N = 3) and 3*** (N = 4). There was only one quantitative randomised controlled trial, which was rated 3***.

Because mixed methods are assessed against more criteria in MMAT than studies that reported only qualitative or quantitative findings, a lower overall score does not necessarily indicate poor quality in both components. For instance, a study may perform well in the qualitative part but less well in the quantitative part, or vice versa. To better capture this nuance, we disaggregated mixed methods studies into their respective qualitative and quantitative components for a more accurate representation of their quality. This reallocation increased the total counts in both qualitative and quantitative categories.

Table 6 shows that the majority of studies that collected qualitative data (N = 20) were rated as high quality. Among the quantitative descriptive studies (N = 3), one was rated 5*****, while two studies received 2**. Quantitative non-randomised studies (N = 13) demonstrated a wider spread of quality scores. The quantitative randomised control trials (N == 2) were of moderate quality, with both studies rated as 3***.

Overall, studies that employed a qualitative study design demonstrated a higher concentration of top-quality ratings (5*****) (N = 14) compared to those employed quantitative study design, which tended to show greater variability, with a notable number of moderate-quality ratings (3***) (N = 8).

Table 5. Quality appraisal.

Study Design	Overall Quality Score	Number of Studies
Mixed methods	5*****	1
	4****	2
	3***	3
	2**	3
Qualitative	5*****	7
	4****	2
	2**	1
	1*	1
Quantitative descriptive	5*****	1
Quantitative non-randomised	4****	3
	3***	4
Quantitative randomised controlled trials	3***	1

Table 6. Study design (qualitative and quantitative components).

Study Design	Overall quality score	Number of Studies
Qualitative	5*****	14
	4****	3
	2**	2
	1*	1
Quantitative descriptive	5*****	1
	2**	2
Quantitative non-randomised	5*****	2
	4****	3
	3***	6
	2**	2
Quantitative randomised controlled trials	3***	2

4. Discussion

4.1. Extent of the evidence

We found 29 studies in total – spanning 20 years. It is worth comparing the number of studies included in our review on the one hand, and in that of Belliveau and Kim (2013) on the other. Belliveau and Kim (2013) did not limit their search to young learners, which allowed them to include studies conducted in secondary and tertiary contexts. Since few of the studies in their review focused squarely on young learners (and these were included in the present review as well), it can be deduced that the research on the effects of drama increases slowly but steadily, and that more studies focusing on young learners have been conducted since Belliveau and Kim's (2013) work over a decade ago. Nevertheless, the research remains limited – rendering drama an innovative pedagogical approach, rather than the status quo for classroom-based research and/or practice.

The studies we found tend to focus on upper-primary children (ages 9–12), who come from diverse L1 backgrounds but are learning English or other Western languages (e.g. German, French) as L2s or additional languages. The studies spanned 13 countries and regions and were conducted in varied educational settings. They employed different drama-based pedagogies, especially extra-curricular drama activities. Moreover, intervention durations varied widely, ranging from 1 to 19 weeks, typically involving one lesson per week of less than 60 minutes. Control groups, where included, generally followed traditional non-drama-based instruction or non-language-related extra-curricular activities. The limited extent and variable nature of the included studies limit the strength of the conclusions we can reliably draw.

4.2. Effects of drama on oral language

For the most part, the effects of drama reported in the studies were positive. It is worth noting, however, that some studies reported null effects of drama on children's linguistic skills. Null effects were also reported in two studies that centred on children's psychological and social outcomes (e.g. Bournot-Trites et al. 2007; Wirag 2024). This could be because the assessments used were not sufficiently sensitive to detect growth (e.g. Centeno 2010) or because the studies were underpowered (e.g. Faitaki, Liggins, and Murphy 2025).

It is worth highlighting that a null effect does not suggest that an effect is absent but, rather, that there is no (statistical) evidence to support the presence of the effect. In other words, the studies above should not be seen as proof against the effectiveness of drama but as calls for further research into the potential of the approach. It is also worth highlighting that no evidence of adverse outcomes was reported in any of the studies, suggesting that drama is a promising approach for young language learners' development.

4.3. Limitations of the research

An important limitation we identified in the included studies was poor reporting. We observed omissions with regard to basic information, such as the participants' gender. While this omission might be innocuous, leaving out details about the duration of the intervention or the activities that were completed by the control groups is more important: without this information, other researchers cannot replicate the studies. Moreover, these omissions limit the application of the research, as practitioners might not be able to understand how to incorporate the approach into their classrooms.

Another limitation was the absence of control groups. 15 studies either did not include a comparison group or provided inadequate details about it. In these cases, observed changes in outcomes could be attributed to factors such as practice effects or the mere passage of time – not necessarily the drama-based intervention itself.

When control groups exist, it is equally important to reflect on what the control group participants do. In 14 studies with control groups, the participants typically engaged in more passive or in non-language-related activities, while the intervention groups participated in interactive, communicative drama-based activities. As such, the observed differences between the control and experimental group(s) could partly reflect the greater opportunities for communicative practice afforded by drama.

The generalisability of the research is also limited by the small sample sizes of individual studies. With the exception of Stanat et al. (2012) and Güngör (2020), the included studies involved a small number of participants. Though a small sample size can be fine if the study is well-powered, many of the studies were reportedly not (e.g. Faitaki, Liggins, and Murphy 2025). This could have blurred the effects observed in individual studies by producing false positives or negatives. Of course, we ought to acknowledge that generalisability is not always the goal: for example, studies that adopt qualitative research methods often aim to provide rich contextual insights (e.g. Lai 2007; McDonnell and O'Boyle 2021; Moosa, Shareefa, and Hammad 2025) instead of generalisable results – highlighting the importance of this kind of research.

This relates to a wider point about the quality of the different studies we encountered. When appraising methodological quality using the MMAT, studies collecting qualitative data were generally rated relative to those collecting quantitative data. Though this rating could be due to a bias inherent to the MMAT, it could also signal that qualitative studies on the topic of drama are more robust. Studies using quantitative measures showed more variability in quality, indicating that there remains a need for more rigorous quantitative evidence to substantiate claims about the effects of drama-based intervention in children's oral language skills.

4.4. Areas for future work

In a nutshell, the review highlights that more research is needed. We identified a small number of studies on the topic of oral language development in young L2 learners. This finding was surprising given the importance of oral language for the acquisition of other skills and, ultimately, academic attainment and given the suitability of drama for teaching young children (Winston 2022).

The review also identified that we need more research with target languages other than English; at the moment, the majority of the studies included in our review focus on English. Since English is commonly taught at schools and extensively used outside the classroom, children tend to have substantial exposure and numerous resources to learn and maintain the language. The use of drama could, therefore, be more productive in the context of teaching L2s that children have less experience with and fewer resources for, as it can offer a creative form of engagement with the language.

It should be highlighted that the small number of studies we identified (and the characteristics of the studies) could have also resulted from two important limitations of the present review. The first limitation concerns the terms we used in our search string, which omitted labels like 'English Language Learner' (ELL) that are used widely in certain contexts (US, Canada, Australia). Including these terms in the string might have resulted in locating publications from these contexts. We are reasonably confident that the manual searches we performed, as well as our wider knowledge of the field, enabled us to effectively track sources that were not uncovered through our search. However, future iterations of this review should adopt a more inclusive search strategy. The second limitation worth acknowledging is the fact that we could only include publications written in English due to our research team's capacity. As mentioned earlier, we had to exclude some potentially relevant publications in German, the inclusion of which might have affected our results – particularly with regard to the geographical spread of the research. We, therefore, urge researchers interested in repeating this systematic review to adopt a multilingual approach to the extent possible.

5. Conclusion

Our systematic review aimed to map the extent of the research on oral language development through drama – focusing specifically on young language learners (defined here as children below the age of 12). It also aimed to pinpoint the reported effects of drama on children's oral language and appraise the studies in order to provide a robust answer to the question of whether drama is an effective pedagogical tool for the (pre-)primary classroom.

Our results revealed that research on the applications and possibilities of drama for early language learning is relatively new – positioning drama as an innovative practice that merits further exploration. The few studies that have been conducted to date target learners with varied characteristics; span numerous geographical contexts and educational environments; use different drama pedagogies and last for dissimilar amounts of time; focus on a range of effects (linguistic, psychological, social); and use diverse research methods to explore the effects of drama. On the one hand, the observed variation highlights the versatility of the medium and its applications. On the other hand, it makes

reaching a unanimous conclusion about the effectiveness of drama challenging. Indeed, it is questionable whether the effects observed would hold across the board or are the product of the specific participant characteristics, geographical contexts, educational environments, intervention designs, or drama approaches used.

As such, this review represents an innovation in and of itself, as it highlights that we do not yet have strong evidence to support the view that drama is an effective pedagogical tool. It is worth restating that this does not mean that drama is not a useful pedagogical tool – our findings highlight that it holds a lot of potential across developmental domains. We, therefore, hope that practitioners use the approach, and we urge researchers to engage in this line of inquiry.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank a number of colleagues from the Department of Education, University of Oxford: Catherine Scutt for helping us formulate the string and decide which databases to use, Professor Victoria Murphy for initial discussions about the systematic review, Dr Catherine Hamilton for sharing information and resources that facilitated the process, and Dr Hamish Chalmers for offering feedback on the protocol and inviting us to talk about it in a REAL Group meeting.

Note

1. Note that in both the 2022 and the 2025 search, 'wrong population' referred exclusively to the participants' age. In other words, the excluded studies concerned adults or children who were over the target age bracket.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Funding

This work was supported by the John Fell Oxford University Press Research Fund [Grant Reference: 0012163].

Notes on contributors

Faidra Faitaki is a Lecturer in Second Language Acquisition at the University of Oxford. Her research explores the linguistic, cognitive, and educational factors that underpin (pre)school-aged children's acquisition of English as a second language. She is also interested in how children's second language knowledge can be improved through the arts and leads the Creative Approaches to Teaching English (CreATE) Group at the Department of Education, University of Oxford.

Sophie Liggins completed her PhD at the University of Essex in 2022. She has worked for many years as a Spanish teacher and more recently as an EAL Coordinator. Her research looks at how education practices can respond appropriately to linguistically diverse secondary school cohorts with a focus on maximising opportunities to harness plurilingual repertoires.

Junying Li completed her MSc in Comparative and International Education (Distinction) at the University of Oxford in 2021. Since then, she held Researcher role s at Oxford Policy Management and

the Department of Education, University of Oxford. She is currently working as a Business Analyst at the British Museum.

Xiaoying Wu completed her MSc in Applied Linguistics and Second Language Acquisition (Distinction) at the University of Oxford in 2022. She has held Research Assistant positions at the University of Hong Kong and the University of Oxford. She is currently completing her DPhil in Education at the University of Oxford, investigating the effectiveness of debate pedagogy in second language learning and critical thinking skills.

ORCID

Faidra Faitaki http://orcid.org/0000-0002-7960-0150

References

Allder, L. 2023. Oral fluency and drama: the effect of drama-based pedagogy on English oral fluency in Key Stage 2 EAL learners in UK primary schools. University of Kent (United Kingdom).

Belliveau, G., and W. Kim. 2013. "Drama in L2 Learning: A Research Synthesis." *Scenario: A Journal of Performative Teaching, Learning, Research* 7 (2): 7–27.

Boland, A., M. G. Cherry, and R. Dickson. 2017. *Doing a Systematic Review: A Student's Guide*. London: SAGE.

Bournot-Trites, M., G. Belliveau, V. Spiliotopoulos, and J. Séror. 2007. "The Role of Drama on Cultural Sensitivity, Motivation and Literacy in a Second Language Context." *Journal for Learning through the Arts* 3 (1): 1–36.

Bowyer-Crane, C., S. Fricke, B. Schaefer, A. Lervåg, and C. Hulme. 2017. "Early Literacy and Comprehension Skills in Children Learning English as an Additional Language and Monolingual Children with Language Weaknesses." *Reading and Writing* 30 (4): 771–790.

Bundy, P., E. Piazzoli, and J. Dunn. 2015. "Sociocultural Theory, Process Drama and Second Language Learning." In *Dramatic Interactions in Education: Vygotskian and Sociocultural Approaches to Drama, Education and Research*, edited by S. Davis, B. Ferholt, H. G. Clemson, S. M. Jansson, and A. Marjanovic-Shane, 153–170. YY: Bloomsbury Publishing.

Centeno, F. 2010. *Setting the Stage to Read: Using Readers' Theater and Timed Reads with English Learners to Improve Fluency and Comprehension* [Doctoral Dissertation]. Davis: University of California Davis.

Chang, L. Y. 2009. *Acting It out: Children Learning English through Story-Based Drama* [Doctoral Dissertation]. Coventry, UK: University of Warwick.

Chong, S. W. 2025. "Synthesis Methods and Reporting Tool (SMART) for Research Syntheses in Applied Linguistics." *Research Synthesis in Applied Linguistics* 1 (1): 17–38.

Coleman, L. E. 2005. "Drama-Based English as a Foreign Language Instruction for Korean Adolescents." Doctoral Dissertation, Pepperdine University (United States).

Cushman, C. 2011. "Re-imagining Reading Instruction for English Language Learners: A Performance Ethnography of Collaborative Play, Inquiry and Drama with Shakespeare in a Third grade classroom." Doctoral Dissertation, The Ohio State University (United States).

Faitaki, F., & Liggins, S.. 2022. The effects of Drama-Based Activities on the Development of Young EAL Pupils' Oral Language. Protocol ofr a Systematic Review. International Database of Education Systematic Reviews. https://idesr.org/article/IDESR000048

Faitaki, F., S. Liggins, and V. A. Murphy. 2025. "Piloting a Drama-Based Oral Language Intervention." *First Language* 45 (3): 282–302.

Faitaki, F., and V. A. Murphy. 2022. "Using Theatre to Improve English as an Additional Language Learners' Communication Skills: A Feasibility Trial." In *Addressing Future Challenges in Early Language Learning and Multilingual Education*, edited by B. Cortina-Pérez, A. Andúgar, A. Álvarez, S. Corral, N. Martínez, and A. Otto, 141–148. Madrid: Dykinson.

Giaitzis, L. 2007. "Using Dramatic Activity to Enhance Junior Core French Students' Motivation and Oral Communication Skills." Masters Dissertation, Brock University.
Göksel, E., and P. H. Zug. 2019. "Embodied Language Learning through Drama: A Tool for Reflection, Professional Development, and Holistic Language Practice." *Babylonia: The Swiss Journal of Language Teaching and Learning* 3:36–42.
Gough, P. B., and W. E. Tunmer. 1986. "Decoding, Reading, and Reading Disability." *Remedial and Special Education* 7 (1): 6–10.
Gu, C., and T. Lornklang. 2021. "The use of Picture-Word Inductive Model and Readers' Theater to Improve Chinese EFL Learners' Vocabulary Learning Achievement." *Advances in Language and Literary Studies* 12 (3): 120–126.
Guilfoyle, N., and M. Mistry. 2013. "How Effective Is Role Play in Supporting Speaking and Listening for Pupils with English as an Additional Language in the Foundation Stage?" *Education 3-13* 41 (1): 63–70.
Güngör, B. 2020. *The Effects of Early Childhood English Language Education Program on Very Young Learners' Vocabulary Knowledge and Communicative Skills* [Doctoral Dissertation]. Istanbul, Turkey: Marmara University.
Hamilton, C., J. Schulz, H. Chalmers, and V. A. Murphy. 2024. "Investigating the Substantive Linguistic Effects of Using Songs for Teaching Second or Foreign Languages to Preschool, Primary and Secondary School Learners: A Systematic Review of Intervention Research." *System* 124:103350.
Hong, Q. N., S. Fàbregues, G. Bartlett, F. Boardman, M. Cargo, P. Dagenais, and P. Pluye. 2018. "The Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) Version 2018 for Information Professionals and Researchers." *Education for Information* 34 (4): 285–291.
Hull, D. 2013. "Theatre, Language Learning and Identity: Empowering Additional Language Learners through Theatre in Education." In *Second Language Learning through Drama*, edited by J. Winston, 31–41. London: Routledge.
Kalogirou, K. 2016. "Step into Drama and Teach English Affordably: A Case Study from Greece." *Scenario* 2016(01):16–29.
Kalogirou, K., G. Beauchamp, and S. Whyte. 2019. "Vocabulary Acquisition via Drama: Welsh as a Second Language in the Primary School Setting." *The Language Learning Journal* 47 (3): 332–343.
Kara, C. 2022. *Improving Speaking Skills of Primary School Students through Drama Plays in English Language Lessons* [Master's Dissertation]. Bursa, Turkey: Bursa Uludag University.
Lai, C. H. 2007. *Internationalisation of English Language Education in Taiwan: Cooperative Learning through Drama in the Elementary School*. Doctoral Dissertation, Durham University (Durham, United Kingdom).
Lee, B. K., E. A. Patall, S. W. Cawthon, and R. R. Steingut. 2015. "The Effect of Drama-Based Pedagogy on PreK – 16 Outcomes: A Meta-analysis of Research from 1985 to 2012." *Review of Educational Research* 85 (1): 3–49.
Lee, S. 2017. *Impact of the Integration of Drama in EFL Teaching: A Multi-case Study of Young Learners' Classrooms* [Doctoral Dissertation]. Coventry, UK: University of Warwick.
Mansouri, S., and L. H. Darani. 2016. "The Effect of Readers Theater on Intermediate Iranian EFL Learners in Terms of Oral Performance and L2 Vocabulary Knowledge." *Modern Journal of Language Teaching Methods* 6 (9): 295–303.
McDonnell, D., and A. O'Boyle. 2021. "Process Drama in the Classroom: A Case Study of Developing Participation for Advanced EAL Learners in an International School." *Scenario: A Journal for Performative Teaching, Learning, Research* 15 (1): 56–75.
Moosa, S., M. Shareefa, and A. Hammad. 2025. "Boosting Fluency and Confidence: The Impact of Role-Play Activities on Speaking Skills of ESL Learners." *International Journal of Literacies* 32 (1): 21–34.
Murphy, V. 2014. *Second Language Learning in the Early School Years Trends and Contexts*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Murphy, V. A., and A. Unthiah. 2015. *A Systematic Review of Intervention Research Examining English Language and Literacy Development in Children with English as an Additional Language (EAL). London: Education Endowment Foundation*.

Ouzzani, M., H. Hammady, Z. Fedorowicz, and A. Elmagarmid. 2016. "Rayyan – a web and Mobile app for Systematic Reviews." *Systematic Reviews* 5 (1): 1–10.
Petticrew, M., and H. Roberts. 2006. *Systematic Reviews in the Social Sciences: A Practical Guide*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
Price, H., and E. Ansong. 2018. *An Evaluation of the Effectiveness of the 'Speech Bubbles' Drama Intervention Programme, 2015-17*. London: University of East London.
Sachasiri, M., and S. Eamoraphan. 2017. "A Comparative Study of Primary Three Students' Oral Interaction Achievement Learning through Communication Games and Role Play at Burapa English Programme School of Thailand." *Scholar: Human Sciences* 9 (1): 62–74.
Siddaway, A. P., A. M. Wood, and L. V. Hedges. 2019. "How to Do a Systematic Review: A Best Practice Guide for Conducting and Reporting Narrative Reviews, Meta-analyses, and Meta-syntheses." *Annual Review of Psychology* 70 (1): 747–770.
Song, M. J. 2012. *Effects of Different Types of Play on Preschoolers' Vocabulary Learning*. Doctoral Dissertation. Arizona State University (Tempe, United States)
Stanat, P., M. Becker, J. Baumert, O. Lüdtke, and A. G. Eckhardt. 2012. "Improving Second Language Skills of Immigrant Students: A Field Trial Study Evaluating the Effects of a Summer Learning Program." *Learning and Instruction* 22 (3): 159–170.
Turgut, M. 2019. *The Effects of Teaching through Drama on English Speaking Anxiety of 6th Grade Students*. Doctoral Dissertation. Konya, Turkey: Necmettin Erbakan University.
Vitsou, M., and M. Papadopoulou. 2020. "Getting Them Back to Class: A Project to Engage Refugee Children in School Using Drama Pedagogy." *Scenario: A Journal for Performative Teaching, Learning, Research* 14 (2): 42–59.
Wager, A., G. Belliveau, J. Beck, and G. W Lea. 2009. "Exploring Drama as an Additional Language through Research-Based Theatre." *Scenario: A Journal of Performative Teaching, Learning, Research* 3 (2): 47–60.
Winston, J. 2022. *Performative Language Teaching in Early Education: Language Learning through Drama and the Arts for Children 3–7*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.
Wirag, A. 2024. "Foreign Language Anxiety and Speaking in English Drama Clubs: Results from a School-and-University Partnership." In *Oracy in English Language Education: Insights from Practice-Oriented Research*, 89–104. Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland.

Appendices

All appendices are available to view on the Open Science Framework (OSF): https://osf.io/qdpaf/overview?view_only = 358c3577c5ec4e49a679f6a740872b74.