



# Drama As A Teaching Method: A Comprehensive Literature Review

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*Abstract:* This comprehensive review examines drama as a pedagogical approach across various educational contexts. Drawing from recent literature spanning 2014 to 2025, this review synthesizes research on Drama in Education (DiE), exploring its theoretical foundations, applications across disciplines, documented benefits, and implementation challenges. The review reveals that drama-based pedagogy serves as a transformative teaching method that engages multiple intelligences, promotes democratic learning spaces, and enhances both cognitive and affective learning outcomes across diverse educational settings. Through systematic analysis of current research, this review demonstrates that drama education represents a sophisticated pedagogical approach with strong empirical support for improving academic achievement, social-emotional development, and essential 21st-century competencies.

*Index Terms* - Drama in Education, Pedagogy, Democratic Learning

## Introduction1. INTRODUCTION

Drama as a teaching method, commonly referred to as Drama in Education (DiE) or educational drama, represents a well-established pedagogical approach that utilizes theatrical techniques and dramatic conventions to enhance learning experiences across various educational contexts. Unlike traditional performance-focused theatre, educational drama emphasizes process over product, using role-play, improvisation, and structured dramatic activities as vehicles for exploring curriculum content and developing essential skills (Akakpo & Ismaila, 2024). The integration of drama into educational settings has gained renewed attention in recent years, particularly as educators seek engaging, student-centered approaches that address holistic child development. According to recent research, drama in education creates democratic spaces where all participants and their views are treated as equal, fostering environments conducive to exploration, learning, and challenging pre-existing knowledge (Umerkajeff, 2014). This pedagogical approach has demonstrated effectiveness across diverse educational contexts, from primary schools to university settings, and across various subject areas including language learning, science education, and social studies.

The significance of drama in education extends beyond mere engagement or entertainment value. Research consistently demonstrates that dramatic activities activate multiple forms of learning simultaneously, engaging students cognitively, emotionally, physically, and socially. This multi-modal engagement aligns with contemporary understanding of how learning occurs, recognizing the interconnected nature of brain function, emotion, and physical experience in the learning process. Furthermore, drama education addresses the growing need for pedagogical approaches that develop creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, and

communication skills, often referred to as essential 21st-century competencies. As educational systems worldwide grapple with preparing students for an uncertain and rapidly changing future, drama education offers a methodology that cultivates precisely these transferable skills while simultaneously supporting traditional academic learning objectives.

## 2. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

### 2.1 Multiple Intelligence and Embodied Learning Theories

Drama education draws substantially from Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligence Theory, engaging various forms of intelligence simultaneously through dramatic activities. Research demonstrates that drama activates logical-mathematical, verbal-linguistic, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal intelligences within integrated learning experiences (Gardner, 1993; Kalidas, 2014). This multi-modal engagement reflects contemporary neuroscientific understanding of learning as an embodied process where brain function, emotions, and physiology remain constantly interconnected. The embodied nature of dramatic learning recognizes that knowledge construction occurs not merely through cognitive processes but through whole-person engagement involving movement, emotion, and social interaction. This theoretical framework challenges traditional classroom practices that privilege cognitive learning while marginalizing physical and emotional dimensions of human experience.

### 2.2 Constructivist and Social Learning Frameworks

Drama education embodies constructivist principles by positioning learners as active participants in knowledge construction rather than passive recipients of information. Through dramatic activities, students engage in meaning-making processes that are simultaneously individual and collective, reflecting Vygotsky's theories of social learning and the zone of proximal development. The collaborative nature of drama activities creates authentic contexts for peer learning, where students negotiate meanings, solve problems collectively, and learn through social interaction. This social dimension of learning through drama extends beyond simple group work to create what researchers describe as "communities of practice" where knowledge is co-constructed through shared dramatic experiences. The improvisational nature of many drama activities further reinforces constructivist principles by requiring students to actively create and test hypotheses within the safety of fictional contexts.

### 2.3 Transformational Learning and Critical Pedagogy

Drama education aligns closely with transformational learning theory as articulated by Mezirow, providing structured opportunities for critical reflection and perspective transformation. Through taking on roles and exploring situations from multiple viewpoints, students engage in what researchers describe as "metaxis," the state of being simultaneously oneself and someone else, which facilitates deep perspective-taking and empathy development. This transformational aspect of drama education connects to critical pedagogy traditions, as dramatic activities often explore issues of power, justice, and social relations within safe fictional frameworks. The aesthetic distance provided by drama allows students to examine challenging or controversial topics with both emotional engagement and critical reflection, supporting the development of critical consciousness and social awareness.

## 3. APPLICATIONS ACROSS EDUCATIONAL CONTEXTS

### 3.1 Drama in Language Education

Extensive research demonstrates the effectiveness of drama-based approaches in language teaching, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. A comprehensive systematic literature review examining publications from 2003 to 2023 analyzed 30 studies that met rigorous inclusion criteria, revealing consistent positive impacts of process drama on EFL education (Sochacka et al., 2024). Drama-based language teaching creates authentic communicative contexts where learners use language for genuine purposes within meaningful dramatic situations. This authenticity contrasts sharply with traditional language exercises that often lack real-world relevance or emotional engagement. Through dramatic activities, language

learners develop not only linguistic competence but also pragmatic and cultural understanding essential for effective communication.

**Table 1** *Benefits of Drama in Language Education*

Benefit Category	Specific Outcomes	Supporting Evidence
Linguistic Development	Improved vocabulary acquisition, Enhanced grammatical accuracy, Better pronunciation	Bessadet (2022), PMC (2024)
Affective Factors	Reduced language anxiety, Increased motivation, Enhanced self-confidence	Multiple studies (2003-2023)
Communicative Competence	Authentic language use, Pragmatic skills development, Non-verbal communication	Systematic review findings
Cultural Understanding	Cross-cultural awareness, Intercultural competence, Cultural empathy	International research synthesis

### 3.2 Drama in STEAM Education

The integration of drama within Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics (STEAM) education represents an emerging field demonstrating significant promise for enhancing scientific learning. Research from the Hungarian Educational Research Journal (2024) indicates that drama in STEAM education improves reasoning abilities, creativity, and interpersonal skills necessary for collaborative scientific work. Drama techniques help make abstract scientific concepts more concrete and accessible by allowing students to embody scientific processes, act out molecular behavior, or role-play historical scientific discoveries. This embodied approach to science learning addresses common challenges in science education, including student disengagement and difficulty understanding abstract concepts. Australian research demonstrates how teachers successfully used improvisation and mime to help Year 3/4 students understand changing states of matter while simultaneously developing scientific writing skills (The Australian Journal of Language and Literacy, 2024).

### 3.3 Drama in Teacher Education

The incorporation of drama techniques in teacher education programs has emerged as a critical area for developing future educators' pedagogical repertoires. A significant 15-week study involving preservice teachers in a Creative Drama Module revealed substantial enhancements in participants' confidence, abilities, and expertise in incorporating dramatic activities into lesson planning (Taylor & Francis, 2025). The research emphasizes that effective implementation requires both theoretical understanding and extensive practical experience with drama techniques. Preservice teachers who receive intentional drama education show increased willingness to use these methods in their future classrooms, recognizing drama's potential for creating engaging and inclusive learning environments. However, the research also indicates that many teacher education programs still lack adequate drama pedagogy components, creating a significant gap between the documented benefits of drama education and its actual implementation in schools.

### 3.4 Drama in Special Education

Drama education has demonstrated particular value for students with learning difficulties, providing alternative pathways for learning that accommodate diverse learning styles and needs. Research by Kitishat (2023) indicates that drama techniques offer multi-sensory learning experiences that can bypass traditional barriers faced by students with learning difficulties. The physical, vocal, and emotional dimensions of dramatic activities provide multiple entry points for understanding and expressing knowledge, allowing students who struggle with traditional text-based learning to demonstrate their understanding through alternative means. Furthermore, the collaborative and supportive nature of drama activities can build confidence and social skills often underdeveloped in students with learning difficulties.

**Table 2** *Drama Techniques for Special Education*

Technique	Application	Benefits for Special Needs Learners
Role Play	Social skills training	Practices real-world interactions safely
Mime and Movement	Concept exploration	Non-verbal expression of understanding
Storytelling	Narrative comprehension	Multi-sensory engagement with text
Improvisation	Problem-solving	Develops flexibility and adaptation
Forum Theatre	Conflict resolution	Explores solutions collaboratively

## 4. DOCUMENTED BENEFITS AND IMPACTS

### 4.1 Academic Achievement and Behavioral Outcomes

Research consistently demonstrates positive correlations between drama education participation and improved academic outcomes across various measures. A significant finding from the Educational Theatre Association (2024) indicates that arts education experiences, including drama, reduce the proportion of students receiving disciplinary infractions by 3.6 percent. This reduction in behavioral issues suggests that drama education contributes to positive school climate and student engagement. Beyond behavioral improvements, studies document enhanced academic performance in core subject areas, with particularly strong effects on literacy development. Drama activities support reading comprehension through embodied exploration of texts, improve writing skills through character development and narrative understanding, and enhance verbal expression through regular opportunities for speaking in role. The multi-sensory nature of dramatic learning appears to support retention of academic content, with students demonstrating better recall of information learned through dramatic activities compared to traditional instructional methods.

### 4.2 Social-Emotional Learning Outcomes

Drama education significantly impacts social-emotional development across multiple dimensions, providing structured opportunities for emotional exploration within safe fictional contexts. Through character portrayal and perspective-taking, students develop enhanced empathy and understanding of diverse viewpoints, skills increasingly recognized as essential for success in multicultural societies. The collaborative nature of drama activities necessitates cooperation, negotiation, and compromise, building interpersonal skills through authentic practice. Research documents increased self-confidence among drama participants, attributed to regular opportunities for self-expression and risk-taking within supportive environments. This confidence often transfers to other academic and social contexts, with students showing increased willingness to participate in class discussions and take on leadership roles.

**Table 3** *Social-Emotional Learning Outcomes Through Drama*

SEL Competency	Drama Activities	Measured Outcomes
Self-Awareness	Character analysis, Emotional exploration	Improved emotional vocabulary, Better self-understanding
Self-Management	Performance preparation, Ensemble work	Enhanced emotional regulation, Stress management
Social Awareness	Perspective-taking, Role reversal	Increased empathy, Cultural sensitivity
Relationship Skills	Collaborative creation, Group problem-solving	Better communication, Conflict resolution
Responsible Decision-Making	Forum theatre, Ethical dilemmas in role	Critical thinking, Ethical reasoning

### 4.3 Development of 21st Century Competencies

Drama education cultivates essential skills increasingly recognized as crucial for success in contemporary society and future workplaces. Creativity and innovation emerge naturally through dramatic activities that require imaginative problem-solving and original thinking within dramatic contexts. Communication skills develop through both verbal and non-verbal expression, with students learning to convey meaning through voice, body, and spatial relationships. Collaboration becomes essential in drama work, as most activities require ensemble cooperation and shared creative vision. Critical thinking develops through analysis of dramatic situations, evaluation of character motivations, and synthesis of complex themes explored through drama. These competencies align closely with skills identified by employers and educators as essential for future success, suggesting that drama education provides practical preparation for life beyond school.

### 4.4 Cultural and Democratic Engagement

Drama education fosters democratic values and civic engagement by creating spaces where diverse perspectives are valued and explored. Through dramatic exploration of social issues, students develop critical consciousness about power relationships, social justice, and civic responsibility. The democratic nature of drama pedagogy, where all participants' contributions are valued, models inclusive decision-making processes and respectful dialogue across differences. Research indicates that students who participate in drama education show increased interest in social issues and greater willingness to engage in civic activities. This civic engagement extends beyond the classroom, with drama participants more likely to participate in community activities and demonstrate concern for social justice issues.

## 5. IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

### 5.1 Process Drama Methodology

Process drama represents a structured approach to educational drama that emphasizes the journey of exploration rather than performance outcomes. This methodology involves participants and teachers working together to create and explore fictional worlds that serve educational purposes. Key characteristics include extended dramatic exploration over multiple sessions, teacher-in-role techniques where educators participate within the drama, and careful structuring to ensure educational objectives are met while maintaining dramatic engagement. Process drama differs from simple role-play by creating complex dramatic contexts that evolve over time, allowing deep exploration of themes and concepts. Teachers using process drama report that the methodology allows for differentiated instruction naturally, as students can participate at their own levels within the shared dramatic framework.

### 5.2 Drama Conventions and Techniques

Successful drama education employs a repertoire of specific conventions and techniques adapted to educational purposes. Hot-seating involves participants interviewing characters to deepen understanding of motivations and contexts, developing both questioning skills and character analysis. Tableau or freeze-frame techniques create still images representing key moments or concepts, allowing visual learners to express understanding through physical positioning and supporting analysis of relationships and power dynamics. Forum theatre, developed by Augusto Boal, engages participants in problem-solving through interactive dramatic scenarios where audience members can stop action and suggest alternatives. Mantle of the Expert, pioneered by Dorothy Heathcote, positions students as experts within dramatic contexts, requiring them to research and apply knowledge to solve problems within the dramatic framework.

**Table 4** Common Drama Conventions in Education

Convention	Description	Educational Applications
Teacher-in-Role	Educator participates within drama	Models' behavior, Challenges thinking, Provides information
Conscience Alley	Two lines offering conflicting advice	Explores moral dilemmas, Decision-making
Thought Tracking	Voicing character's inner thoughts	Develops inference, Emotional understanding
Role on the Wall	Visual character mapping	Character analysis, Perspective exploration
Ritual and Ceremony	Creating dramatic rituals	Cultural understanding, Community building

### 5.3 Curriculum Integration Models

Research identifies several effective models for integrating drama across curriculum areas, each offering different advantages depending on educational contexts and objectives. Cross-curricular integration uses drama as a methodology for exploring content across subject boundaries, such as using historical drama to integrate history, language arts, and social studies learning. Genre-based integration employs drama to support specific learning objectives within individual subjects, such as using drama to teach scientific processes or mathematical concepts. Project-based learning with drama at its center allows extended investigation of topics through sustained dramatic exploration, often culminating in sharing of learning with authentic audiences. Each integration model requires careful planning to ensure that both dramatic and curricular objectives are met without one overshadowing the other.

## 6. CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 6.1 Addressing Implementation Barriers

Despite substantial evidence supporting drama education's effectiveness, significant barriers impede widespread implementation in educational settings. Teacher preparation emerges as a primary challenge, with many educators lacking confidence or training in drama pedagogy. This lack of preparation stems from limited drama components in teacher education programs and insufficient professional development opportunities for practicing teachers. Time constraints within packed curricula create additional pressure, with drama often perceived as time-consuming compared to traditional instructional methods. Space and resource limitations further complicate implementation, as many schools lack appropriate spaces for movement-based activities or budgets for basic drama resources. Assessment challenges arise from the process-oriented nature of drama education, which conflicts with standardized testing paradigms dominating many educational systems.

### 6.2 Professional Development Recommendations

Addressing the implementation gap requires comprehensive professional development approaches that build educator confidence and competence in drama pedagogy. Initial teacher education programs should integrate substantial drama pedagogy components, including both theoretical understanding and extensive practical experience. For practicing teachers, ongoing professional development should provide hands-on experience with drama techniques, opportunities to observe experienced practitioners, and support for initial implementation attempts. Creating communities of practice among drama-using educators can provide ongoing support and resource sharing. Professional development should emphasize the curricular applications of drama rather than performance skills, addressing teachers' concerns about their own dramatic abilities.

**Table 5** Professional Development Framework for Drama Education

Development Stage	Focus Areas	Support Strategies
Beginner	Basic techniques, Classroom management	Workshops, Mentoring, Video resources
Developing	Curriculum integration, Assessment	Peer observation, Collaborative planning
Proficient	Advanced techniques, Leadership	Action research, Conference presentation
Expert	Innovation, Mentoring others	Research partnerships, Publication

### 6.3 Policy and Systemic Recommendations

Realizing drama education's potential requires systemic changes in educational policy and practice. Educational policies should recognize drama as essential to comprehensive education rather than optional enrichment, allocating appropriate time within curricula for arts-based learning. Assessment systems need expansion to value creative and collaborative learning outcomes alongside traditional academic measures. Funding structures should support arts education equitably with other subject areas, including provisions for professional development and resources. School leadership plays crucial roles in creating cultures that value diverse pedagogical approaches, including drama. International examples demonstrate that systemic support for drama education correlates with improved educational outcomes across multiple measures.

### 6.4 Future Research Directions

While existing research provides strong evidence for drama education's benefits, several areas require further investigation to strengthen the evidence base and improve practice. Longitudinal studies tracking students' development over extended periods would provide insights into drama education's lasting impacts on academic, social, and personal development. Comparative research across different cultural contexts could illuminate how drama pedagogy might need adaptation for diverse settings. Investigation of drama's potential in digital and hybrid learning environments has become particularly urgent following global shifts toward online education. Development of assessment tools appropriate for drama-based learning would address one of the major implementation barriers. Research into optimal professional development models could improve the preparation of drama-capable educators.

## 7. CONCLUSION

This comprehensive review demonstrates that drama as a teaching method represents a sophisticated pedagogical approach with strong theoretical foundations and extensive empirical support. The evidence consistently indicates that drama education enhances academic achievement while simultaneously developing social-emotional competencies and essential 21st-century skills. From improving language acquisition in EFL contexts to making abstract scientific concepts accessible, from supporting students with learning difficulties to preparing future teachers, drama education shows remarkable versatility and effectiveness across diverse educational contexts. The transformative potential of drama education extends beyond individual learning outcomes to encompass broader goals of education, including the development of empathetic, creative, and critically aware citizens capable of navigating complex social realities.

However, realizing this potential requires addressing significant implementation barriers through comprehensive approaches involving teacher preparation, policy reform, and systemic support. The gap between research evidence and classroom practice remains substantial in many educational contexts, suggesting that advocacy and systematic implementation strategies are as important as continued research. As education systems worldwide seek pedagogical approaches that prepare students for uncertain futures while addressing diverse learning needs, drama education offers a proven methodology that engages the whole person in meaningful learning. The question facing educators and policymakers is not whether drama belongs in education, but rather how to ensure all students have access to its transformative benefits. The research clearly indicates that drama education should be viewed not as an optional extra but as a fundamental pedagogical approach capable of enriching and transforming educational experiences across all curriculum areas.

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