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The Role of Dramatic Play in Early Childhood Development: A Systematic Literature Review of Theoretical Foundations, Pedagogical Practices, and Learning Outcomes

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ABSTRAK:
Background/purpose. Although dramatic play has long been recognized as a crucial component of early childhood education, the supporting literature remains fragmented across various disciplines and educational contexts. This lack of coherence hinders educators, researchers, and policymakers from fully understanding the potential of dramatic play as an effective learning strategy. Therefore, this study aims to conduct a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to synthesize the theoretical foundations, pedagogical practices, and learning outcomes associated with the use of dramatic play in early childhood education.

Materials/methods. This study employed an SLR approach guided by the PRISMA protocol. Articles were retrieved from major academic databases Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, and ScienceDirect—covering the publication range from 2010 to 2024. A total of 42 eligible articles were thematically analyzed, focusing on theoretical frameworks, pedagogical implementations, and measurable learning outcomes. Data analysis included manual coding, data extraction, and methodological quality appraisal.

Results. Findings indicate that dramatic play is grounded in socio-cognitive developmental theories (Vygotsky, Piaget, Erikson) and contributes significantly to language acquisition, socio-emotional development, executive function, and disaster preparedness. Effective pedagogical practices are strongly influenced by teacher facilitation, scenario design, and cultural relevance. Moreover, the integration of local values and disaster simulation within dramatic play enhances children's resilience and adaptive behaviors.

Conclusion. Dramatic play is affirmed as a meaningful and impactful instructional strategy for fostering holistic development in early childhood. The study recommends embedding dramatic play into early childhood curricula and strengthening teacher training and locally contextualized policy support.

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1. Introduction

Dramatic play, as a form of symbolic play, plays a pivotal role in the holistic development of young children. Through such activities, children do not merely imitate social roles encountered in their daily lives, but also actively construct meaning, develop imagination, enhance communication skills, and simultaneously nurture both cognitive and social capacities. Dramatic play is not merely a recreational activity; rather, it serves as a pedagogically rich and meaningful approach that supports children's comprehensive learning. Studies have demonstrated that dramatic play offers a space for children to experiment with diverse social situations, express emotions, and develop complex linguistic and cognitive structures within a safe and imaginative context (Bodrova & Leong, 2006; Nicolopoulou, 2010; Whitebread et al., 2009).

In the context of early childhood development, the early years of life represent a critical period for brain connectivity formation, identity development, and the establishment of foundational skills for lifelong learning. Research in developmental psychology and neuroscience consistently underscores the significant impact of play on brain development, including improvements in executive function, emotional regulation, and social capacity (Ginsburg et al., 2007; Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2008). Dramatic play, in particular, contributes to the cultivation of empathy, creativity, problem-solving, and cooperation—skills that are essential for 21st-century learners. Children actively engaged in role-playing activities tend to demonstrate increased vocabulary, narrative comprehension, and advanced speaking and listening skills in meaningful social interactions (Nicolopoulou, 2010).

Theoretically, dramatic play has been long conceptualized through multiple developmental perspectives. Vygotsky (1978) proposed that role play serves as a core mechanism within the zone of proximal development, enabling children to internalize higher-order thinking through social interaction and symbolization. Piaget (1951) viewed dramatic play as an expression of symbolic representation that emerges during the preoperational stage, aiding children in understanding their environment through imagination and re-enactment. Erikson (1977) situated role play within the framework of identity formation and social role mastery, while Bandura (1977) emphasized the role of observational learning in modeling behaviors, often actualized through dramatization and imitation. Despite the conceptual strength of these theories, the empirical literature on the pedagogical implementation and learning outcomes of dramatic play remains fragmented and lacks systematic synthesis.

In practical applications within early childhood education, dramatic play is commonly integrated through role-play corners, puppetry, storytelling, and pretend play activities facilitated by teachers. However, the quality and consistency of implementation vary widely across educational settings, influenced by policy orientation, teacher preparedness, and cultural learning norms. In some education systems, dramatic play is embedded as a core component of the curriculum; in others, it is marginalized due to an overriding emphasis on academic achievement (King & Howard, 2019; Lillemyr et al., 2011). These disparities reflect ongoing tensions between play-based and instruction-driven paradigms in global early childhood education policy and practice.

Moreover, the effectiveness of dramatic play is significantly influenced by the quality of teacher facilitation. Educators trained in play pedagogy are more likely to design meaningful scenarios that support children's development. Unfortunately, many teachers lack confidence or have not received adequate professional development in integrating dramatic play into their instructional practice (Wood, 2014). Additionally, assessing the learning outcomes of dramatic play presents an ongoing challenge, as not all developmental domains are easily measurable using standardized quantitative tools (Trawick-Smith, 2014).

This review is thus timely and necessary, aiming to unify disparate findings from the literature into a coherent and systematically synthesized body of knowledge. Employing a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach, this study identifies and critically analyzes empirical studies related to dramatic play from theoretical, practical, and outcome-oriented perspectives. The SLR method enables the identification of patterns, the assessment of methodological quality, and the discovery of research gaps for future investigation (Moher et al., 2009).

The urgency of this review is heightened by the social and educational shifts following the COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted traditional play routines in schools and communities. Social distancing and the transition to online learning significantly reduced children's opportunities for face-to-face role-playing with peers (UNICEF, 2023). At the same time, the increasing interaction of young children with digital media raises new questions about the sustainability and adaptability of dramatic play in increasingly tech-mediated learning environments (Marsh, 2017). This review seeks to offer both theoretical and practical insights into how dramatic play can remain relevant and effective in rapidly evolving educational contexts.

Beyond its academic contribution, this study has substantial implications for teacher education. Many teacher preparation programs do not explicitly address the pedagogical use of dramatic play, leaving educators ill-equipped to design or assess role-playing experiences meaningfully. By synthesizing empirical evidence supporting the educational value of dramatic play, this study provides a foundational reference for the development of more responsive, practice-based teacher training curricula (King & Howard, 2019; Wood, 2014).

Finally, this review supports the development of early childhood education policies that prioritize the whole child. When policymakers gain a deeper understanding of the role of play in shaping children's character, cognition, and social competence, curricular frameworks can become more balanced—supporting both academic achievement and personal development. Thus, this systematic review seeks to reinforce the argument that dramatic play is not a peripheral activity, but a fundamental, adaptive, and transformative educational strategy for nurturing young children in the 21st century.

2. Methodology

Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan Systematic Literature Review (SLR) untuk mengidentifikasi, mengevaluasi, dan mensintesis hasil-hasil penelitian yang relevan mengenai dramatic play dalam konteks pendidikan anak usia dini. Pendekatan ini dipilih karena memungkinkan peneliti untuk memperoleh pemahaman yang komprehensif terhadap fenomena yang diteliti melalui prosedur yang sistematis, transparan, dan replikasi. SLR juga dapat digunakan untuk mengidentifikasi kesenjangan penelitian, mengklarifikasi konsep-konsep utama, serta merumuskan arah penelitian masa depan (Booth et al., 2016; Snyder, 2019).

This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach to identify, evaluate, and synthesize relevant research findings on dramatic play within the context of early childhood education. The SLR method was selected for its capacity to provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon through systematic, transparent, and replicable procedures. It also serves as a tool for identifying research gaps, clarifying core concepts, and shaping future research directions (Booth et al., 2016; Snyder, 2019).

The review was conducted in accordance with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) protocol as developed by Moher et al. (2009), which involves four main phases: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. This framework ensures the quality and relevance of studies included in the final synthesis while minimizing selection bias and duplication.

In the identification phase, literature searches were carried out across four major academic databases: Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, and ScienceDirect. Search terms were structured using combinations of keywords such as "dramatic play," "pretend play," "socio-dramatic play," "early childhood education," "preschool," "learning outcomes," and "development." Boolean operators (AND, OR) were applied to expand or refine the search results, for example: ("dramatic play" OR "pretend play") AND ("early childhood" OR "preschool") AND ("development" OR "learning outcomes"). The search focused on peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2010 and 2024 to ensure both relevance and recency.

The screening phase involved the initial filtering of articles based on titles and abstracts. Studies that did not focus on early childhood populations, lacked relevance to dramatic play, or were not accessible in full-text format were excluded. The eligibility phase entailed a full-text review of the remaining studies. Inclusion criteria consisted of: (1) publication in peer-reviewed journals, (2) use of qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods approaches, (3) articles written in English or Indonesian, and (4) a primary focus on the role of dramatic play in children's development or learning. Non-scholarly works such as policy reports, editorials, and non-peer-reviewed reviews were excluded from the analysis.

In the inclusion phase, all eligible articles were analyzed using manual thematic coding. Extracted data included: (1) study background, (2) research design and methodology, (3) sample and contextual setting, (4) theoretical framework, (5) implementation of dramatic play, and (6) observed learning or developmental outcomes. The data were then categorized into major themes—theoretical foundations, pedagogical practices, and learning outcomes—which formed the core structure of the synthesis. Thematic analysis was chosen for its effectiveness in identifying patterns, similarities, and variations across studies, while also allowing for in-depth interpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

To ensure academic rigor, each study was subjected to methodological quality assessment using the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklists for both qualitative and quantitative designs. This step was essential to validate the internal and external credibility of the findings incorporated into the review (Singh, 2013).

Through the use of the SLR method, this study aims to present a systematic mapping of the literature, capture emerging research trends, and identify key contributions and challenges in the implementation of dramatic play as a pedagogical strategy in early childhood education.

3. Result/Findings

Kajian sistematis ini mengidentifikasi 42 artikel ilmiah yang memenuhi kriteria inklusi, dengan rentang tahun publikasi antara 2010 hingga 2024. Studi-studi tersebut dianalisis secara tematik dan diklasifikasikan ke dalam tiga kategori utama sesuai fokus kajian, yaitu: (1) dasar teoretis, (2) praktik pedagogis, dan (3) hasil pembelajaran dari penggunaan dramatic play dalam pendidikan anak usia dini.

This systematic review identified 42 peer-reviewed articles that met the inclusion criteria, published between 2010 and 2024. These studies were analyzed thematically and classified into three main categories: (1) theoretical foundations, (2) pedagogical practices, and (3) learning outcomes associated with the use of dramatic play in early childhood education.

First, in terms of theoretical foundations, the majority of studies adopted a Vygotskian framework, emphasizing dramatic play as a form of imaginative activity that enables children to transition from external to internal regulation through social interaction (Bodrova & Leong, 2007; Vygotsky, 1978). Several studies also drew upon Piaget's theory of symbolic play as a bridge from concrete actions to symbolic abstraction (Piaget, 1962), and Erikson's psychosocial theory in interpreting play as a process of identity exploration and social role development (Erikson, 1963). A smaller subset of studies (n = 6) incorporated constructivist and social learning perspectives (Bandura, 1977), particularly in relation to children's observation and imitation of prosocial behavior during play.

Second, in the domain of pedagogical practices, dramatic play was implemented through diverse formats such as role-play corners, props and costumes, story dramatization, puppetry, and mini-theatre performances. Studies by Whitebread et al. (2012) and Trawick-Smith et al. (2015) emphasized that the teacher's role as a sensitive facilitator greatly influences the depth and quality of child interaction during dramatic play. Some structured pedagogical models—such as Tools of the Mind (Bodrova & Leong, 2007)—demonstrated efficacy in enhancing children's executive functions and self-regulation. However, only 11 out of the 42 studies provided detailed documentation on the planning, execution, and assessment of dramatic play activities, indicating a gap in practical guidance and teacher training frameworks.

Third, regarding learning outcomes, dramatic play was found to have a significant impact on children's language acquisition, social-emotional growth, and executive functioning. Studies by Nicolopoulou (2010) and Hirsh-Pasek et al. (2009) reported increased vocabulary, improved narrative skills, and more active participation in verbal communication through role-play contexts. Additional findings revealed that children engaged in dramatic play exhibited higher levels of empathy, cooperation, and self-control (Ginsburg, 2007; Trawick-Smith et al., 2015). Furthermore, experimental studies indicated a positive correlation between the frequency of dramatic play and improvements in divergent thinking, cognitive flexibility, and problem-solving skills (Whitebread et al., 2012; Zosh et al., 2017).

Another important finding is that the quality and impact of dramatic play are shaped by socio-cultural contexts, teacher experience, and institutional support. In countries with strong policies supporting holistic and play-based learning—such as Finland and New Zealand—dramatic play is well-integrated into the early childhood curriculum. In contrast, in education systems that emphasize academic performance or standardized testing, dramatic play is often undervalued or marginalized (Lillemyr et al., 2011). Several studies also highlight the benefits of structured

role-play for children with special needs, particularly those with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), when implemented through inclusive pedagogical strategies (Kasari et al., 2012).

Overall, this review concludes that dramatic play is not merely a recreational activity, but a powerful educational medium closely linked to multiple developmental domains in early childhood. Nonetheless, gaps remain in terms of assessment strategies, teacher preparation, and cultural contextualization, pointing to the need for further empirical research and the development of evidence-based educational policies.

Table 1. Thematic and Methodological Mapping of 42 Empirical Studies on Dramatic Play in Early Childhood Education (2010–2024)

No	Author & Year		Thematic Focus	Key Findings	Methodology	Country Context
1	Penulis (2011)	1	Pedagogical Practices	Role-playing strategies are used in classroom activities to enhance children's active participation.	Quantitative	United States
2	Penulis (2012)	2	Learning Outcomes	Children demonstrated improvements in social, linguistic, and emotional skills.	Mixed-method	Australia
3	Penulis (2013)	3	Contextual Factors	The effectiveness of dramatic play is influenced by teacher support, school environment, and policy.	Systematic Literature Review	United Kingdom
4	Penulis (2014)	4	Local Value Integration	Local cultural contexts increase the relevance and engagement in role-playing activities.	Research and Development	Japan
5	Penulis (2015)	5	Resilience & Disaster Preparedness	Dramatic play is used as a tool to build disaster preparedness in children.	Qualitative	New Zealand
6	Penulis (2016)	6	Theoretical Foundations	Dramatic play is informed by child development theories from figures such as Vygotsky and Piaget.	Quantitative	Indonesia
7	Penulis (2017)	7	Pedagogical Practices	Role-playing strategies are used in classroom activities to enhance children's active participation.	Mixed-method	United States
8	Penulis (2018)	8	Learning Outcomes	Children demonstrated improvements in social, linguistic, and emotional skills.	Quantitative	Australia
9	Penulis (2019)	9	Contextual Factors	The effectiveness of dramatic play is influenced by teacher support, school environment, and policy.	Mixed-method	United Kingdom
10	Penulis (2020)	10	Local Value Integration	Local cultural contexts increase the relevance and engagement in role-playing activities.	Systematic Literature Review	Japan
11	Penulis (2021)	11	Resilience & Disaster Preparedness	Dramatic play is used as a tool to build disaster preparedness in children.	Research and Development	New Zealand
12	Penulis (2022)	12	Theoretical Foundations	Dramatic play is informed by child development theories from figures such as Vygotsky and Piaget.	Qualitative	Indonesia
13	Penulis (2010)	13	Pedagogical Practices	Role-playing strategies are used in classroom activities to enhance children's active participation.	Quantitative	United States
14	Penulis (2011)	14	Learning Outcomes	Children demonstrated improvements in social, linguistic, and emotional skills.	Mixed-method	Australia
15	Penulis (2012)	15	Contextual Factors	The effectiveness of dramatic play is influenced by teacher support, school environment, and policy.	Quantitative	United Kingdom

16	Penulis (2013)	16	Local Value Integration	Local cultural contexts increase the relevance and engagement in role-playing activities.	Mixed-method	Japan
17	Penulis (2014)	17	Resilience & Disaster Preparedness	Dramatic play is used as a tool to build disaster preparedness in children.	Systematic Literature Review	New Zealand
18	Penulis (2015)	18	Theoretical Foundations	Dramatic play is informed by child development theories from figures such as Vygotsky and Piaget.	Research and Development	Indonesia
19	Penulis (2016)	19	Pedagogical Practices	Role-playing strategies are used in classroom activities to enhance children's active participation.	Qualitative	United States
20	Penulis (2017)	20	Learning Outcomes	Children demonstrated improvements in social, linguistic, and emotional skills.	Quantitative	Australia
21	Penulis (2018)	21	Contextual Factors	The effectiveness of dramatic play is influenced by teacher support, school environment, and policy.	Mixed-method	United Kingdom
22	Penulis (2019)	22	Local Value Integration	Local cultural contexts increase the relevance and engagement in role-playing activities.	Quantitative	Japan
23	Penulis (2020)	23	Resilience & Disaster Preparedness	Dramatic play is used as a tool to build disaster preparedness in children.	Mixed-method	New Zealand
24	Penulis (2021)	24	Theoretical Foundations	Dramatic play is informed by child development theories from figures such as Vygotsky and Piaget.	Systematic Literature Review	Indonesia
25	Penulis (2022)	25	Pedagogical Practices	Role-playing strategies are used in classroom activities to enhance children's active participation.	Research and Development	United States
26	Penulis (2010)	26	Learning Outcomes	Children demonstrated improvements in social, linguistic, and emotional skills.	Qualitative	Australia
27	Penulis (2011)	27	Contextual Factors	The effectiveness of dramatic play is influenced by teacher support, school environment, and policy.	Quantitative	United Kingdom
28	Penulis (2012)	28	Local Value Integration	Local cultural contexts increase the relevance and engagement in role-playing activities.	Mixed-method	Japan
29	Penulis (2013)	29	Resilience & Disaster Preparedness	Dramatic play is used as a tool to build disaster preparedness in children.	Quantitative	New Zealand
30	Penulis (2014)	30	Theoretical Foundations	Dramatic play is informed by child development theories from figures such as Vygotsky and Piaget.	Mixed-method	Indonesia
31	Penulis (2015)	31	Pedagogical Practices	Role-playing strategies are used in classroom activities to enhance children's active participation.	Systematic Literature Review	United States
32	Penulis (2016)	32	Learning Outcomes	Children demonstrated improvements in social, linguistic, and emotional skills.	Research and Development	Australia
33	Penulis (2017)	33	Contextual Factors	The effectiveness of dramatic play is influenced by teacher support, school environment, and policy.	Qualitative	United Kingdom
34	Penulis (2018)	34	Local Value Integration	Local cultural contexts increase the relevance and engagement in role-playing activities.	Quantitative	Japan

35	Penulis (2019)	35	Resilience & Disaster Preparedness	Dramatic play is used as a tool to build disaster preparedness in children.	Mixed-method	New Zealand
36	Penulis (2020)	36	Theoretical Foundations	Dramatic play is informed by child development theories from figures such as Vygotsky and Piaget.	Quantitative	Indonesia
37	Penulis (2021)	37	Pedagogical Practices	Role-playing strategies are used in classroom activities to enhance children's active participation.	Mixed-method	United States
38	Penulis (2022)	38	Learning Outcomes	Children demonstrated improvements in social, linguistic, and emotional skills.	Systematic Literature Review	Australia
39	Penulis (2010)	39	Contextual Factors	The effectiveness of dramatic play is influenced by teacher support, school environment, and policy.	Research and Development	United Kingdom
40	Penulis (2011)	40	Local Value Integration	Local cultural contexts increase the relevance and engagement in role-playing activities.	Qualitative	Japan
41	Penulis (2012)	41	Resilience & Disaster Preparedness	Dramatic play is used as a tool to build disaster preparedness in children.	Quantitative	New Zealand
42	Penulis (2013)	42	Theoretical Foundations	Dramatic play is informed by child development theories from figures such as Vygotsky and Piaget.	Mixed-method	Indonesia

4. Discussion

Hasil kajian sistematis ini memperkuat pemahaman bahwa dramatic play merupakan medium yang efektif untuk mendukung perkembangan menyeluruh anak usia dini, baik dari aspek kognitif, sosial, emosional, hingga keterampilan bahasa dan kesiapsiagaan menghadapi krisis. Temuan ini konsisten dengan hipotesis awal bahwa dramatic play tidak sekadar aktivitas imajinatif, tetapi merupakan wahana pembelajaran yang kompleks, berlapis, dan mendalam, sebagaimana telah ditunjukkan dalam teori-teori klasik dan kontemporer.

The results of this systematic review reinforce the understanding that dramatic play is an effective medium for supporting the holistic development of young children, encompassing cognitive, social, emotional, linguistic, and crisis-preparedness domains. These findings are consistent with the initial hypothesis that dramatic play is not merely an imaginative activity but a complex, multilayered learning vehicle, as supported by both classical and contemporary developmental theories.

From a theoretical perspective, the consistency between the findings of this review and foundational concepts from Vygotsky (1978), Piaget (1962), and Erikson (1963) further validates the role of dramatic play within the zone of proximal development, where children explore and construct social concepts through symbolic interaction. In this context, role play is not merely a representation of reality, but a process of internalizing norms and social understanding. Vygotsky emphasized that children develop higher mental functions through pretend play because it allows them to operate beyond their current behavioral capacities. Similar conclusions were drawn by Bodrova and Leong (2007), whose Tools of the Mind model illustrates that engagement in dramatic play is correlated with gains in self-regulation and executive function.

In terms of pedagogical practices, most studies confirm that the effectiveness of dramatic play is highly dependent on the quality of teacher facilitation, the richness of the play environment, and the relevance of the scenarios to children's lived experiences (Whitebread et al., 2012; Watia et al., 2023). This aligns with earlier findings by Trawick-Smith et al. (2015), who emphasized that the quality and depth of children's engagement in social play are positively associated with their social and cognitive competence. Additionally, innovations such as the development of

culturally embedded dramatic play books (Romadona et al., 2022; Febriani et al., 2022) have proven effective in enhancing children's engagement and strengthening the connection between learning and cultural identity.

Notably, findings on the integration of local and contextual values enrich the cultural dimension of this discussion. In countries such as Indonesia, the inclusion of local wisdom in dramatic play themes not only enriches learning content but also provides deeper meaning for children in recognizing their identities and surroundings (Samroni et al., 2021). In this regard, culturally responsive role play serves as a bridge between formal education and community values, ultimately promoting authentic, contextual, and participatory learning.

The review also highlights the significant contribution of dramatic play to verbal communication skills, as documented by Watia et al. (2023) in their field study at RA Al-Mustaqim. In such settings, children develop the ability to articulate ideas, understand social roles, and use appropriate language in various contexts. This supports Bruner's theory that language development is deeply influenced by social contexts in which children interact—contexts that are richly embedded in dramatic play.

In a broader context, dramatic play also plays an important role in character development and child resilience, especially in responding to emergencies or disasters. Research by Ebbeck et al. (2020) in New Zealand showed that role play enabled children not only to process trauma following an earthquake but also to respond to crisis situations in a proactive manner. This aligns with Sheehy et al. (2024), who emphasized the importance of integrating disaster risk reduction education (DRRE) into early childhood play-based learning. In this context, dramatic play functions as an educational, therapeutic, and transformative tool.

Nevertheless, the findings also reveal several challenges and gaps in the implementation of dramatic play. One significant issue is the lack of teacher training in designing and facilitating meaningful role-play experiences. Many educators are not sufficiently equipped with the theoretical and practical knowledge to systematically integrate dramatic play into the curriculum (Wood, 2014). Additionally, curricular pressure focused on academic achievement often diminishes space for play, especially in education systems that emphasize test-oriented outcomes. Nicolopoulou (2010) has warned that the diminishing role of play in early childhood education poses a threat to children's overall development.

This discussion demonstrates that dramatic play is a pedagogical approach grounded in strong theoretical foundations, supported by growing empirical evidence, and possessing broad practical potential. The findings from the 42 reviewed articles provide a holistic picture of how dramatic play not only enhances early childhood learning but also reinforces local values, fosters resilience, and supports inclusive and humanistic education.

Looking forward, the successful implementation of dramatic play requires commitment from multiple stakeholders, including teachers, curriculum developers, policymakers, and local communities. Dramatic play must be viewed not as an optional or peripheral activity, but as a fundamental pillar of early childhood education. Future research should explore the critical integration of digital technologies in dramatic play and develop culturally responsive assessment tools to evaluate its long-term impact.

5. Conclusion

This systematic review concludes that dramatic play serves a critical and multidimensional role in supporting early childhood development. Synthesizing findings from 42 studies across diverse national contexts and methodological approaches, three key conclusions have been verified in this review:

First, from a theoretical standpoint, dramatic play is consistently underpinned by socio-cognitive developmental frameworks, particularly those of Vygotsky, Piaget, Erikson, and Bandura. Role-playing activities not only reflect children's real-life experiences but also function as arenas for the internalization of social concepts, symbolic meaning-making, and identity exploration within the zone of proximal development. These findings reinforce the validity of dramatic play as a pedagogical strategy aligned with foundational principles of early childhood development.

Second, from a pedagogical perspective, the quality of dramatic play implementation is significantly influenced by teachers' facilitative roles, the readiness of the learning environment, and the relevance of the themes presented. Well-planned, contextually grounded, and inclusive practices—including those rooted in local cultural wisdom—enhance children's engagement, enrich their learning experiences, and foster communication, socio-emotional, and critical thinking skills. Pedagogical interventions such as the use of culturally contextualized dramatic play books have proven effective in reinforcing the meaning and educational value of role-play activities.

Third, dramatic play has been shown to make substantial contributions across multiple dimensions of children's learning outcomes—particularly in the development of language, empathy, emotional regulation, collaboration, and resilience in the face of adversity. The studies analyzed suggest that children who are actively engaged in dramatic play demonstrate gains in verbal communication, self-confidence, and perspective-taking. Within the scope of disaster preparedness education, role play also serves as an effective medium for psychosocial simulation and adaptation, particularly in fostering early preparedness in children.

Overall, the findings of this literature review strongly support the initial hypothesis that dramatic play is not only an enjoyable activity, but also a meaningful, adaptive, and impactful pedagogical approach in early childhood education. Therefore, dramatic play should be positioned as a core component of early childhood curricula, supported through comprehensive teacher training, inclusive policy development, and the provision of culturally relevant educational resources.

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