Role-Play in Language Learning: A Bibliometric Analysis and its Impact on Thailand Secondary Education

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Article Info	Abstract
	Purpose This study investigates the trends, challenges, and pedagogical implications of role-play as a method for English language learning in Thai secondary schools. **Methodology** Utilizing bibliometric analysis, 800 publications from 2019 to 2024 were analyzed to identify research patterns and thematic developments. **Results/Findings** The results reveal a consistent decline in research output, with the highest number of publications recorded in 2019 and 2020 (170 articles each), followed by a significant decrease in subsequent years. The bibliometric analysis identified 44 key terms distributed across six thematic clusters, emphasizing areas such as communication skills, student engagement, and interdisciplinary applications. Despite the declining research focus, role-play remains an effective pedagogical tool for enhancing English speaking proficiency, fostering authentic communication, and building learner confidence. However, its implementation in Thai secondary schools faces challenges, including traditional teacher-centered approaches, large class sizes, and limited resources. To address these challenges, this study highlights the potential of integrating modern technologies, such as virtual and augmented reality, into role-play activities to enhance accessibility and engagement. Furthermore, it underscores the importance of adopting performance-based assessments to evaluate students' progress more effectively. **Implications** This research contributes to the understanding of role-play's enduring relevance and offers practical recommendations for its revitalization in language education. By addressing existing barriers and leveraging innovative approaches, role-play can remain a transformative strategy for fostering English language proficiency and student engagement in Thai secondary school contexts.

1. Introduction

English language education in Thailand is currently undergoing significant changes. Historically, as Thailand was never formally colonized by the British Empire, there was limited emphasis on teaching and learning English. However, this has shifted considerably in recent decades, with English now recognized as a core priority within the nation's educational system (e.g., Baker and Jarunthawatchai, 2017). Makheja (2023) highlighted the vital role of English proficiency in opening up academic, personal, and professional opportunities. She argued that learning

English can lead to improved career prospects, deeper cultural understanding, expanded social networks, and access to diverse educational courses. Presently, English is mandated as a foreign language subject in the national curriculum, starting from primary school through the end of secondary education. This curriculum aims to cultivate students' knowledge, skills, and positive attitudes towards English (Ministry of Education, 2017).

One of the most popular learning techniques nowadays is role-playing, in which players take on a particular position and communicate with one another while considering a real-world environment. frequently been seen as an excellent option for enhancing English language proficiency, particularly productive abilities (speaking and writing) (Huang et al,2021). Role-playing helps pupils learn how to be imaginative and appreciative of disasters when they occur. According to (Fatonah et al., 2018), using the role-playing approach has a big impact on students' understanding of seismic catastrophes. Other scholars (Bhattacharjee, 2014; Krisdiana, Irawati, & Kadarisman, 2018) have also demonstrated this, providing examples of how role-playing models may be used to improve motivation and engagement between students and teachers as well as among students.

In Thailand, English plays an equally crucial role as it does in many other developing nations and the most crucial aspect of student growth is the way that teachers regulate their learning. Speaking is thought to be the most crucial of the four essential language skills for acquiring a second or foreign language. Speaking comprised all other language-related skills, according to Ur (1996). it can be observed that a country's everyday use of English is impacted by a variety of non-anchangeable geographic, historical, cultural, and political aspects. However, the significance of English at a particular moment in history must influence not just how it is taught but also how it affects students' daily lives and personal development. It is far harder to pinpoint the role that English plays in the lives of many second and foreign-language learners now than it was a few years ago (Rustamov, 2022). The research aimed to this study explores how to use role-playing in Thailand secondary school to manage English language acquisition.

This study aims to address this gap by exploring the application of role-play in secondary school contexts in Thailand as a strategy for managing and enhancing English language acquisition. While role-play has been extensively studied in various educational contexts, its specific implementation and outcomes in Thai secondary schools remain underexplored. By analyzing trends and developments in role-play research through bibliometric analysis, this study seeks to provide a deeper understanding of its potential to transform English language education in Thailand. Tools such as VOSviewer will be utilized to map research themes and identify key areas of focus, offering valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and researchers.

2. Methods

This study employed bibliometric analysis as the primary research method, encompassing several systematic stages. The initial step involved collecting article data, which formed the basis of the analysis. Research documents focusing on the topic of "Role-play" were gathered, specifically those indexed in Google Scholar between 2019 and 2024. The data collection was facilitated by the Publish or Perish application, yielding a dataset of 500 articles for analysis. The collected articles were saved in two formats: (.csv) for analysis using Microsoft Excel and (.ris) for visualization and further analysis using the VOSviewer application. After data collection, the articles underwent a filtering process to ensure the completeness of critical components, such as the year of publication. The filtered data were subsequently analyzed using Microsoft Excel to identify initial patterns and trends. Visualization of the data was conducted with VOSviewer, enabling the identification of thematic developments and interrelations within the research field.

3. Results

3.1. Development of role-play publications 2019-2024

Table 1 presents an annual summary of research on "Role-play" published in national and international journals over the past five years. The data indicates that a total of 500 documents were published during this period. The distribution of these publications is as follows: 170 documents in 2019, 170 documents in 2020, 85 documents in 2021, 32 documents in 2022, 31 documents in 2023, and 12 documents in 2024. From these figures, it is evident that the number of research publications on "Role-play" has steadily declined from 2019 to 2024. The highest number of studies was recorded in 2019 and 2020 (170 documents each), while the lowest was observed in 2024 (12 documents). Figure 1 illustrates this trend, showing a consistent year-on-year decrease in the number of publications, with a significant drop of approximately 85 documents between 2020 and 2021. This steady decline raises questions about the reduced focus on "Role-play" as a research topic in recent years.

Role-play has been recognized as an effective pedagogical approach, particularly in English language learning. It provides students with an opportunity to experiment and engage actively in class activities. By simulating real-life scenarios, role-play encourages learners to use and develop essential language skills that foster social interactions. Notably, it benefits shy students by allowing them to adopt roles that differ from their usual

personas, helping them build confidence in communication. The most compelling reason for using role-play in language learning is its engaging and enjoyable nature. Research suggests that role-play can significantly enhance learners' communication skills by offering them ample opportunities to express their thoughts and ideas in the target language. Furthermore, it boosts learners' self-confidence, enabling them to respond appropriately in various social situations.

Table 1: Annual report research on "role-play".

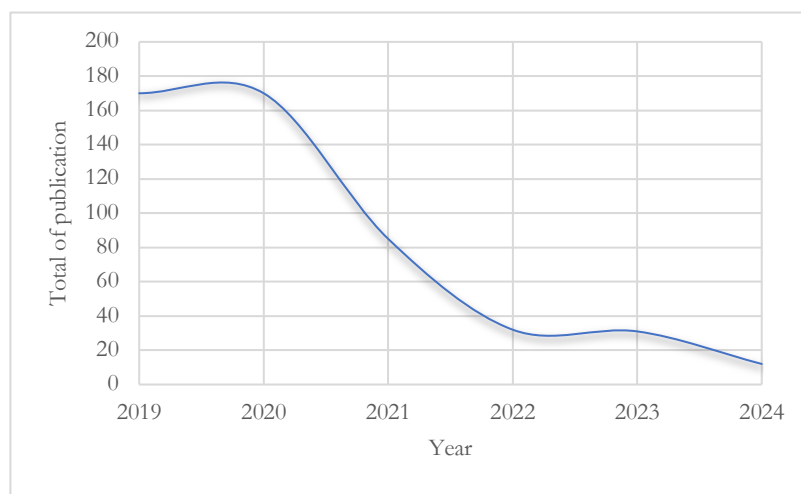| Year	Documents	Percentages (%)
2019	170	34
2020	170	34
2021	85	17
2022	32	6.4
2023	31	6.2
2024	12	2.4
Total	500	100

Figure 1: Annual report of publications

The findings from this analysis reveal a notable decrease in research output related to "Role-play" over the past five years. Despite this decline, the significance of role-play in language learning remains undisputed. It continues to be a valuable tool for improving learners' language proficiency and social competence. This study contributes to the understanding of role-play's relevance by reviewing existing literature and highlighting its diverse applications in educational contexts. Future research could explore innovative ways to integrate role-play into modern pedagogical practices, ensuring its continued utility in language education.

3.2. Trend of role-play research citations 2019-2024

In this research we present 20 articles regarding role-play that have the highest number of citations. Table 2 presents some metadata from articles with the highest number of citations. Based on Table 2, it is known that many articles with the title "Manufacturing consent" written by ES Herman, N Chomsky. in 2021 are articles about role-play that are most frequently cited. total 13122 cited. The second research article the title "Performative acts and gender constitution: An essay in phenomenology and feminist theory" written by J Butler. in 2020. are articles about role-play that are most frequently cited. total 13051 cited. The third research article title "Cognitive behavior therapy: Basics and beyond" written by JS Beck. in 2022. are articles about role-play that are most frequently cited. total 10920 cited. The fourth research article title "Stability and complexity in model ecosystems" written by RM May. in 2019, are articles about role-play that are most frequently cited. total 10425 cited. and the fifth research article title "Physics-informed neural networks: A deep learning framework for solving forward and inverse problems involving nonlinear partial differential equations" written by M Raissi, P Perdikaris, GE Karniadakis. in 2019. are articles about role-play that are most frequently cited. total 10318 cited.

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Table 2: Difference role-play and tarticles with the most citations.

No	Cites	Title	Year	Cites Per Year	CitesPer Author	Ref
1	13122	Manufacturing consent	2021	4374	6561	Herman & Chomsky (2021)
2	13015	Performative acts and gender constitution: An essay in phenomenology and feminist theory	2020	3253.75	13015	Butler (2020)
3	109425	Cognitive behavior therapy: Basics and beyond	2020	2730	10920	Beck (2020)
4	10318	Stability and complexity in model ecosystems	2019	2085	10425	May (2019)
5	6559	Physics-informed neural networks: A deep learning framework for solving forward and inverse problems involving nonlinear partial differential equations	2019	2063.6	3439	Raissi et al. (2019)
6	5886	How to conduct a bibliometric analysis: An overview and guidelines	2021	2186.33	1312	Donthu et al. (2021)
7	5557	Optical properties of solids	2020	1471.5	2943	Moore & Smart (2020)
8	5445	Introduction to documentary	2024	5557	5557	Nichols (204)
9	5331	Setting the agenda: Mass media and public opinion	2020	1361.25	2723	McCombs & Valenzuela (2020)
10	4220	Difference-in-differences with multiple time periods	2021	17777	2666	Callaway & Sant'Anna (2021)
11	4217	Third-world literature in the era of multinational capitalism	2023	4220	4420	Jameson (2023)
12	3919	Making learning fun: A taxonomy of intrinsic motivations for learning	2021	1405.67	2109	Malone & Lepper (2021)
13	3919	Birnie, Boyle, and Redgwell's international Law and the environment	2021	1306.33	1960	Boyle & Redgwell (2021)
14	3884	The role of renewable energy in the global energy transformation	2019	776.8	777	Gielen et al (2019)
15	3782	Fractional calculus and waves in linear viscoelasticity: an introduction to mathematical models	2022	1891	3782	Mainardi (2022)
16	3768	On the genealogy of morality	2023	3768	3768	Nietzsche (2023)
17	3445	Playing indian	2022	1722.5	3445	Deloria (2022)
18	3346	Corporate governance and the board of directors: Performance effects of changes in board composition	2019	669.2	1673	Baysinger & Butler (2019)
19	3152	The role of hydrogen and fuel cells in the global energy system	2019	630.4	630	Staffell et al. (2019)
20	3149	Ferroptosis: mechanisms, biology and role in disease	2021	1049.67	1050	Jiang et al. (2021)

3.3. Visualization of Research Data Mapping

The bibliometric data analysis conducted using VOSviewer generated three types of visualizations: network visualization, overlay visualization, and density visualization. The network visualization, represented in Figure 2, reveals that terms extracted from abstracts and keywords are categorized into four clusters comprising 48 items. These items are connected by 983 links with a total link strength of 9,524, indicating a strong level of interconnectivity among the key terms. Each item is further characterized by its individual link strength and frequency of occurrence, providing insights into the relationships and relevance of the terms. The overlay visualization, as shown in Figure 3, offers a temporal perspective, mapping the evolution of terms over time and highlighting shifts in research focus. Meanwhile, the density visualization, illustrated in Figure 4, highlights the intensity of research attention on specific terms, with higher density areas indicating more frequently explored topics and strong interconnections. Together, these visualizations provide a comprehensive view of thematic trends, revealing critical areas of focus and potential directions for future research in "Role-play." The following is a more detailed explanation of each cluster:

3.3.1. Cluster 1 marked in red consists of 9 items, identification, imitation, learning, mediating role, prominent role, relationship, role-playing, simulation and way

3.3.2. Cluster 2 marked in green consists of 9 items, active role, article, chatgpt, education, information, student, teacher, technique and technology

3.3.3. Cluster 3 marked in blue consists of 8 items, child, interest, major role, pivotal role, pretend play, progression, ros and type

3.3.4. Cluster 4 marked in yellow consists of 7 items, book, experience, focus, game, influence, role-playing game and video game

3.3.5. Cluster 5 marked in purple consists of 6 items, art, gender, language, leadership, play and work

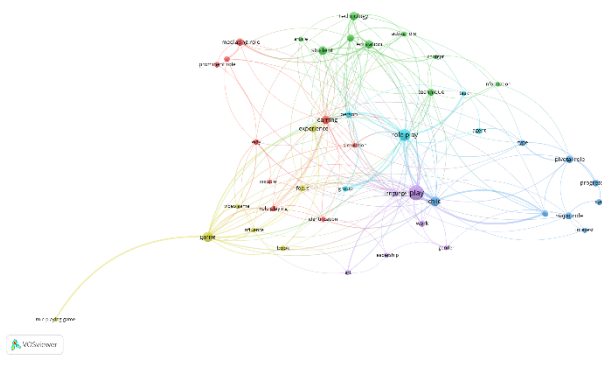3.3.6. Cluster 6 marked in sky-blueconsists of 5 items, agent, group, person, role-play and task
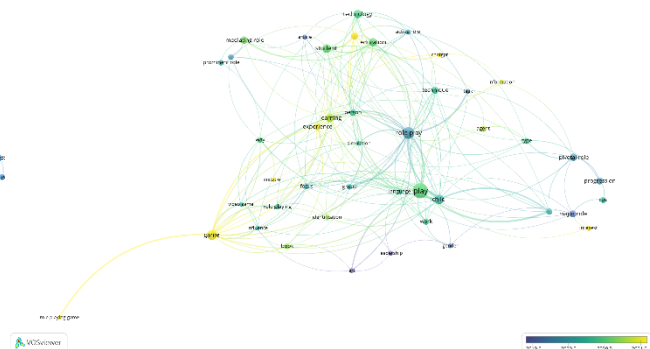

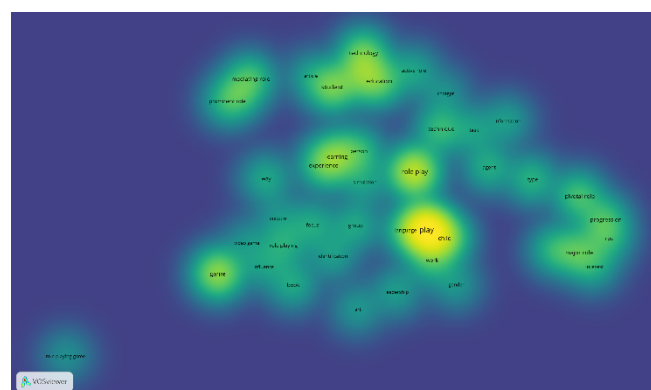Figure 2: Network visualization

Figure 3: Overlay visualization

Figure 4: Density visualization

4. Discussion

The findings of this study offer valuable insights into the research trends on role-play, with a particular focus on its application in language learning contexts. Over the past five years, the decline in publications on role-play reflects shifting research priorities, yet the enduring relevance of role-play in language education remains evident.

This discussion assesses the implications of role-play specifically within secondary school contexts in Thailand, where it holds significant potential as a pedagogical tool.

In Thailand, secondary schools play a crucial role in equipping students with practical English communication skills, reflecting the country's recognition of English as a global lingua franca. The Thai government has emphasized the necessity of English proficiency in education and business, making it a compulsory subject in schools (Imsa-ard, 2020). This initiative aligns with the ASEAN Economic Community's goals, which promote English as the working language (Jindapitak, 2018). However, challenges persist, including the influence of the Thai language on English learning and the need for effective teaching methodologies (Watcharapunyawong & Usaha, 2012; Teng & Sinwongsuwat, 2015). Role-play serves as an effective strategy in achieving these objectives, particularly in fostering speaking skills, which are often deemed the most challenging for learners (Ur, 1996; Ramdani et al., 2024). By simulating real-world scenarios, role-play provides students with opportunities to practice authentic communication in a supportive environment, thereby improving fluency and confidence.

Role-play also aligns with the goals of Thailand's national curriculum, which emphasizes not only linguistic competence but also the development of positive attitudes toward English (Ampatuan & Jose, 2016). By engaging students in interactive and enjoyable activities, role-play can motivate learners and create a more dynamic classroom atmosphere (Abduh et al., 2022). Moreover, its adaptability to diverse topics and contexts allows educators to tailor activities to the specific needs and interests of their students.

While the benefits of role-play are well-documented, its implementation in Thai secondary schools is not without challenges. One major barrier is the traditional teacher-centered approach that remains prevalent in many classrooms, which may limit the integration of interactive strategies like role-play (Asrianti & Reskyani, 2022). Additionally, large class sizes and limited resources in public schools can pose logistical difficulties for conducting role-play activities effectively. Despite these challenges, role-play offers significant opportunities for enhancing language learning in Thai secondary schools. For instance, the introduction of digital tools and platforms can facilitate role-play in virtual environments, overcoming physical and logistical constraints. Studies have shown that digital role-play, supported by technologies like augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR), can engage students more effectively and provide immersive language-learning experiences (Zhu, 2024).

The use of role-play in Thai secondary school contexts necessitates a focus on formative assessment strategies that capture the dynamic and interactive nature of this activity. Traditional assessment methods, such as written tests, may not adequately reflect students' progress in communication skills. Instead, performance-based assessments, such as peer and teacher evaluations of role-play activities, can provide more meaningful insights into students' speaking abilities and social interaction skills (Dörnyei, 2001). Rubrics tailored to assess fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary usage, and the ability to respond appropriately in various scenarios can further enhance the evaluation process.

5. Conclusions

This study offers a thorough examination of research trends on role-play and its implications for English language learning, particularly within the context of secondary education in Thailand. Over the past five years (2019–2024), role-play research has experienced a notable decline in scholarly output. A total of 800 publications were identified during this period, with the peak years being 2019 and 2020, each producing 170 articles. This was followed by a consistent reduction in output: 85 articles in 2021, 32 in 2022, 31 in 2023, and only 12 in 2024. The downward trend suggests a diminishing focus on role-play as a research area, possibly due to shifting academic priorities or broader changes in educational practices and methodologies.

The bibliometric analysis, conducted using the VOSviewer application, highlighted 44 key terms related to role-play research, categorized into six distinct clusters. These clusters reflect critical themes, such as Bibliometric Analysis, English, and Role-play, with each item varying in occurrences, link strength, and interconnections. This mapping underscores the diversity and interdisciplinary nature of role-play research, while also emphasizing its core focus areas within the field of education.

In the Thai secondary school context, role-play remains a critical pedagogical tool, facilitating authentic language use, enhancing speaking proficiency, and fostering student confidence. Furthermore, it aligns closely with the objectives of Thailand's national curriculum, which prioritizes the development of linguistic competence and positive attitudes toward English. However, barriers such as teacher-centered instructional models, large class sizes, and limited access to resources pose significant challenges to its widespread implementation.

To address these challenges and reinvigorate interest in role-play research, future studies should explore innovative approaches, particularly those integrating technology such as virtual and augmented reality. These tools have the potential to transform role-play activities, making them more accessible, scalable, and engaging. Additionally, the adoption of performance-based assessments tailored to role-play activities would provide a more nuanced understanding of students' progress in communication skills and overall language development.

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