

A Comparative Analysis of Research Trends in Theatre Education in China and Korea

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Abstract

This study compares research trends in theatre education in China and Korea from 2016 to 2025. Following PRISMA 2020, journal articles indexed in CNKI and RISS were reviewed, and 36 studies were selected for final analysis: 24 from China and 12 from Korea. The results show that Chinese studies increased after 2019, while Korean studies remained relatively few and scattered across years. In both countries, theoretical and literature-based studies were common. Korean articles mainly addressed creativity, imagination, embodied experience, and reflection, whereas Chinese articles focused more on aesthetic education, moral and values education, ideological and political education, and curriculum integration. The findings should be understood as trends within CNKI and RISS journal articles, not as a generalization of theatre education in both countries.

Key words : Theatre education, Educational drama, Research trends, China, Korea

I. Introduction

Theatre education engages learners through role play, improvisation, and dramatic composition, integrating language, body, emotion, and social interaction. It supports creativity, expression, cooperation, and social-emotional competence (Dawson et al., 2011), and can foster pre-service teachers' empathy and awareness of professional conflicts (Briones et al., 2022). Theatre education has developed in relation to arts education policy in both China and Korea. In Korea, it has been discussed within

cultural arts education, school arts education, and arts instructor support policies (MCST and KACES, 2016). In China, it has been linked to school aesthetic education and curriculum reform, especially through the 2020 school aesthetic education policy and the 2022 compulsory arts curriculum standards (General Office of the CPC Central Committee and General Office of the State Council, 2020; Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2022). These different policy and curriculum contexts may shape research topics, educational goals, and teaching practices.

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In this study, theatre education is used as an inclusive term covering Drama in Education, Creative Drama, Process Drama, and related approaches that use theatre as educational content or as a teaching and learning method. Previous studies have examined theatre education within single-country contexts, specific teaching methods, or theoretical discussions (Kwon, 2023; Ham, 2024, 2025; Yang and Jo, 2020; Zhou, 2021; Ma, 2023). However, few studies have compared Chinese and Korean theatre education research using common analytical criteria while considering policy contexts. Therefore, this study compares selected CNKI- and RISS-indexed journal articles on theatre education in China and Korea from 2016 to 2025. It focuses on publication trends, educational levels, research methods, research topics, educational goals, teaching and learning characteristics, and policy contexts. The purpose is not to generalize all theatre education research in the two countries, but to describe trends within the selected journal articles. The research questions are as follows. Research Question 1. What are the characteristics of the included theatre education studies in China and Korea from 2016 to 2025 in terms of publication year, educational level or research context, and research method? Research Question 2. What similarities and differences do the included studies show in terms of research topic, educational goal, and teaching and learning characteristics? Research Question 3. How are the trends found in the included studies related to the arts education policies and educational systems of China and Korea?

II . Method

This study used the identification, screening,

eligibility assessment, and inclusion stages of PRISMA 2020 as a reporting reference to describe the literature selection process. It was not a meta-analysis, an effect-size synthesis, or a full systematic review of all available sources. The purpose was to describe the quantitative distribution and content characteristics of theatre education research in China and Korea. The period from 2016 to 2025 was selected as a recent ten-year research window. Chinese articles were searched in the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI), and Korean articles were searched in the Research Information Sharing Service (RISS). Because the search was limited to these two databases, the findings should be interpreted within the scope of CNKI- and RISS-indexed journal articles. The search terms were “戏剧教育,” “戏剧教学,” and “教育戏剧” for CNKI, and “연극교육,” “교육연극,” and “드라마교육” for RISS. Searches were limited to titles and keywords. The search period was from January 2016 to December 2025, and only journal articles were included. Theses, field reports, project reports, and unpublished practice reports were excluded to keep the two national datasets comparable in review process, bibliographic information, and method reporting. Studies were included when they focused on theatre education or educational drama in an educational context and provided accessible full texts. Studies were excluded when they focused only on performing arts, theatre history, playwriting, acting training, simple class cases, or program introductions without sufficient research analysis. Studies that mentioned theatre education only marginally or lacked accessible full texts or basic information were also excluded. A total of 2,873 records were identified: 1,596 from CNKI and 1,277 from RISS. The 2,873 records were used to

examine broad annual publication trends, whereas the 36 finally included studies were used for detailed content analysis. After duplicate removal and title/abstract screening, 186 records remained. Among them, 52 full-text articles were assessed for eligibility. Sixteen were excluded: descriptive class cases or program introductions without sufficient research analysis ($n = 5$), performance or acting practice studies ($n = 4$), studies that mentioned theatre education only marginally ($n = 4$), and studies with inaccessible full texts or insufficient information ($n = 3$). Finally, 36 studies were included in the content analysis: 24 Chinese studies and 12 Korean studies. The literature selection process is presented in <Table 1>. The 36 studies were coded according to the operational definitions and decision rules presented in <Table 2>. For frequency analysis, one dominant category was assigned to each study for each coding variable. The first author completed the initial coding, and the second author reviewed the classifications. Ambiguous cases were resolved through discussion. Formal inter-rater reliability statistics were not calculated.

<Table 1> Literature Selection Process

Stage	Description	Number of studies
Identification	Records identified through CNKI and RISS database searching	2,873
Screening	Records remaining after duplicate removal and title/abstract screening	186
Eligibility	Full-text articles assessed for eligibility	52
Included	Studies included in final content analysis	36

Note. Excluded full-text articles ($n = 16$) were descriptive cases or program introductions without sufficient analysis ($n = 5$), performance or acting-practice studies ($n = 4$), marginal mentions of theatre education ($n = 4$), or inaccessible or insufficiently documented articles ($n = 3$).

III. Results

The results are organized by the three research questions. <Tables 3–5> present publication year, educational level, and research method; <Tables 6–8> present research topic, educational goal, and teaching-learning characteristics; and <Tables 9–10> present policy and system contexts.

1. Publication Year, Educational Level or Research Context, and Research Methods

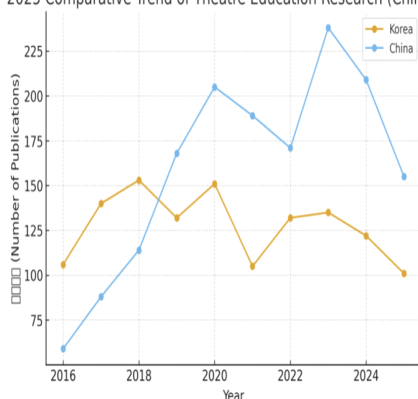
<Table 3> presents the yearly distribution of the 36 included studies. The largest number of studies was published in 2023 ($n = 7$, 19.4%). Overall, Chinese studies increased more clearly after 2019, whereas Korean studies were fewer and more dispersed across the 2016–2025 period. [Fig. 1] shows the yearly distribution of the initially retrieved records from CNKI and RISS and provides a broader context for this trend.

<Table 4> shows that university and higher education contexts were the most common ($n = 14$, 38.9%), followed by studies covering elementary and secondary education together ($n = 7$, 19.4%). Korean studies included more non-specific theoretical work on the meaning of theatre education, creativity, embodied experience, imagination, and relationships. In contrast, Chinese studies were more concentrated in university, higher education, and elementary-secondary school contexts, indicating a stronger link to school practice, higher education, value education, humanities education, and aesthetic education.

As shown in <Table 5>, theoretical, literature-based, and conceptual studies were dominant ($n = 21$, 58.3%). Empirical studies, including qualitative, survey, and experimental or quasi-experimental

designs, were limited. Korean studies included a small number of empirical studies, whereas Chinese studies were more strongly oriented toward policy, curriculum, teaching strategy, and implementation.

2016-2025 Comparative Trend of Theatre Education Research (China vs. Korea)



[Fig. 1] Annual Trends in Theatre Education Research in CNKI and RISS(2016-2025).

<Table 3> Yearly Distribution of Included Core Studies (n = 36)

Year	Korea	China	Total	Percentage
2016	1	0	1	2.8%
2017	2	0	2	5.6%
2018	0	1	1	2.8%
2019	1	5	6	16.7%
2020	2	0	2	5.6%
2021	0	2	2	5.6%
2022	1	3	4	11.1%
2023	3	4	7	19.4%
2024	1	5	6	16.7%
2025	1	4	5	13.9%
Total	12	24	36	100.0%

<Table 2> Operational Definitions and Decision Rules for Coding

Coding item	Operational definition	Evidence used for coding	Decision rule
Educational level	Main educational context addressed in the study	Participants, school level, curriculum context, or research context	If several levels appeared, the level most directly analyzed was coded. For theoretical or policy studies, the broader research context was coded.
Research method	Main methodological approach used in the study	Method section, data source, and analysis procedure	The dominant method was coded according to the main evidence and procedure used in the study.
Research topic	Main issue addressed by the study	Title, abstract, purpose, research questions, and conclusion	One dominant topic was assigned for frequency analysis.
Educational goal	Main educational outcome or value emphasized in the study	Purpose, discussion, and conclusion	If multiple goals appeared, the goal most closely related to the study purpose was coded.
Teaching-learning characteristics	Main instructional activity or pedagogical strategy described in the study	Methods, program description, teaching cases, and examples of classroom practice	Specific instructional activities were prioritized over general theoretical discussion.

<Table 4> Education Level or Research Context

Category	Korea	China	Total	Percentage
Early childhood / children	0	2	2	5.6%
Elementary school	1	2	3	8.3%
Middle school	1	0	1	2.8%
High school	0	1	1	2.8%
Elementary-secondary combined	2	5	7	19.4%
University / higher education	3	11	14	38.9%
School-wide / special group	0	3	3	8.3%
Non-specific / theoretical	5	0	5	13.9%
Total	12	24	36	100.0%

<Table 5> Research Methods

Category	Korea	China	Total	Percentage
Theoretical, literature, or conceptual study	6	15	21	58.3%
Policy or curriculum analysis	1	2	3	8.3%
Case or practical study	0	4	4	11.1%
Program/model/course development and application	1	3	4	11.1%
Qualitative empirical study	2	0	2	5.6%
Quantitative survey	1	0	1	2.8%
Experimental /quasi-experimental study	1	0	1	2.8%
Total	12	24	36	100.0%

2. Research Topics, Educational Goals, and Teaching and Learning Characteristics

<Table 6> shows that character, morality, values, and citizenship education was the most frequent topic ($n = 8$, 22.2%), followed by aesthetic or arts education policy and curriculum ($n = 7$, 19.4%). Korean studies tended to emphasize creativity, imagination, embodied experience, relationships, reflective thinking, and the theoretical value of theatre education. In contrast, Chinese studies more often addressed moral and values education, aesthetic education, ideological and political education, curriculum integration, and higher education. In this dataset, Korean articles were more often linked to creativity and theoretical discussion, while Chinese articles were more often linked to policy, values education, and curriculum.

<Table 7> indicates that character, morality, values, and citizenship were the most frequent educational goals ($n = 11$, 30.6%), followed by creativity, imagination, and innovation ($n = 9$, 25.0%). Korean studies emphasized creativity, imagination, and embodied experience, while Chinese studies emphasized values, citizenship, aesthetic literacy, and socially responsible education. This difference shows that the two countries shared an interest in the developmental value of theatre education but placed emphasis on different educational outcomes.

<Table 8> shows that role play, role experience, and situation simulation were the most frequent teaching and learning features ($n = 10$, 27.8%). Both countries emphasized participatory drama activities, including improvisation, performance, and embodied expression. However, Chinese studies more often linked these activities to curriculum integration and school-wide practice, whereas Korean studies more often discussed them in relation to process-oriented learning, reflection, and the intrinsic value of theatre education.

<Table 6> Major Research Topics

Category	Korea	China	Total	Percentage
Creativity, imagination, embodied cognition	4	0	4	11.1%
Character, moral, values, and citizenship education	2	6	8	22.2%
Aesthetic/arts education policy and curriculum	1	6	7	19.4%
Interdisciplinary/curriculum-integrated learning	2	3	5	13.9%
Teacher or professional education	1	1	2	5.6%
Higher education/humanities education	0	3	3	8.3%
Learner development, academic or emotional outcomes	0	3	3	8.3%
Theory/history/teaching strategy of theatre education	2	2	4	11.1%
Total	12	24	36	100.0%

<Table 7> Educational Goals

Category	Korea	China	Total	Percentage
Creativity, imagination, and innovation	5	4	9	25.0%
Character, morality, values, and citizenship	2	9	11	30.6%
Aesthetic/artistic literacy and cultural understanding	1	5	6	16.7%
Academic achievement, subject understanding, and cognitive ability	1	2	3	8.3%
Communication, collaboration, and emotional relationship	1	2	3	8.3%
Teacher/professional development and identity	1	1	2	5.6%
Holistic/humanistic development	1	1	2	5.6%
Total	12	24	36	100.0%

<Table 8> Teaching and Learning Characteristics

Category	Korea	China	Total	Percentage
Role play, role experience, or situation simulation	3	7	10	27.8%
Improvisation, drama games, or embodied expression	2	5	7	19.4%
Script writing or scenario development	1	0	1	2.8%
Performance, presentation, or campus drama	2	3	5	13.9%
Interdisciplinary/curriculum-integrated drama learning	0	6	6	16.7%
Reflection, discussion, or metacognitive inquiry	1	0	1	2.8%
Policy/theoretical discussion without specific classroom activity	3	3	6	16.7%
Total	12	24	36	100.0%

3. Theatre Education Research in Relation to Arts Education Policy and Educational Systems

These patterns can be understood in relation to each country's arts education policy and educational system. As summarized in <Table 9>, Korean studies discussed theatre education mainly within cultural arts education, school arts education, curriculum-linked instruction, and teacher education. Chinese studies were more directly connected to aesthetic education policy, compulsory arts curriculum reform, moral and values education, ideological and political education, and interdisciplinary learning. <Table 10> presents the top five normalized keywords by country. The keyword frequency results supported the category-based interpretation. Chinese articles were frequently associated with aesthetic education,

values education, higher education, and curriculum integration, whereas Korean articles were frequently associated with creativity, imagination, embodied experience, and relationships.

<Table 9> Comparative Summary of Theatre Education Research Trends(Korea/China)

Country	Main policy context	Relation to theatre education research
Korea	Culture and arts education policy, school arts education, arts instructor support, cooperative arts activities	Theatre education was discussed as part of school arts education, cultural arts education, creativity, cooperation, and teacher education.
China	School aesthetic education policy, 2022 compulsory arts curriculum standards, moral and values education, ideological-political education	Theatre education was discussed as a practical strategy for aesthetic education, moral education, curriculum reform, and interdisciplinary learning.

Taken together, the 36 studies indicate that both countries view theatre education as a participatory and experiential approach. However, Korean studies mainly emphasized the creative, aesthetic, relational, and experiential value of theatre education, whereas Chinese studies connected theatre education more strongly with policy, curriculum reform, values education, and interdisciplinary practice. This difference suggests that theatre education research in the two countries reflects not only different research interests but also different policy directions and educational system needs.

IV. Conclusion

This study compared 36 CNKI- and RISS-indexed journal articles on theatre education published from 2016 to 2025. The dataset included 24 Chinese articles and 12 Korean articles. The

<Table 10> Major Keywords by Country

Rank	Korea: major normalized keywords	Frequency	China: major normalized keywords	Frequency
1	Theatre education / educational drama	12	Educational drama / drama education	24
2	Creativity / creative thinking	4	Moral, values, and ideological-political education	6
3	Imagination	3	Aesthetic education / arts education	6
4	Embodied cognition / body / intuition	3	Higher education / university education	6
5	Relationship / dialogue / co-existence	3	Interdisciplinary learning / curriculum integration	5

findings should be read as trends within the selected journal articles, not as a general account of all theatre education research in China and Korea. The main findings are summarized according to the research questions.

First, theatre education research increased after 2019, especially in China. University and higher education contexts were the most common, and theoretical or literature-based studies dominated. This indicates that empirical research on theatre education remains limited in both countries.

Second, both countries understood theatre education as a participatory and experiential approach that supports expression, role experience, interaction, and learner engagement. However, their emphases differed. Korean studies tended to focus on the intrinsic value of theatre education, including creativity, imagination, embodied experience, relationships, and reflective thinking. Chinese studies more often addressed aesthetic education, moral and values education, ideological and political education, curriculum integration, and higher education practice. In teaching and learning

characteristics, role play, situation simulation, improvisation, performance, and curriculum-integrated activities appeared in both countries. Chinese studies, however, more strongly framed these activities as strategies for school curriculum implementation.

Third, the trends were related to each country's policy and educational context. Korean studies framed theatre education mainly as a medium for creativity, expression, coexistence, and reflection, whereas Chinese studies framed it more as a route for aesthetic education, values education, curriculum reform, and school-based implementation.

Future research should clarify related concepts and expand empirical studies on classroom practice and learner experience. Teacher education should include practice in designing role play, improvisation, embodied expression, reflection, and curriculum-linked drama activities. Comparative studies should also move beyond literature reviews to examine actual classroom practice, teacher experience, and curriculum implementation.

This study has several limitations. The search was limited to one major database for each country: CNKI for China and RISS for Korea. Theses, field reports, and project reports were also excluded to keep the dataset comparable. This may have left out practice-based materials from the field. Therefore, relevant studies indexed in other databases may have been missed. The final dataset included only 36 studies, which limits the generalizability of the findings. In addition, each study was coded into one dominant category for frequency analysis, which may not fully capture the multiple themes and goals of individual studies.

Although the coding framework was reviewed by the second author, formal inter-rater reliability statistics were not calculated. The relationship between policy contexts and research trends was

interpreted descriptively, and this study did not test whether specific policies caused changes in research topics or methods. Finally, this study examined research trends rather than the effects of theatre education. Therefore, the findings should be interpreted as a comparative overview of research trends, not as evidence of educational effectiveness.

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