

Finnish Children's Perceptive to Kamishibai: A Multisensory Storytelling Method for Arts-Based Literature and Language Education

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ABSTRACT

In this study, we investigated kamishibai as a pedagogical artefact. Kamishibai is a Japanese art form and it incorporates storytelling, performing, visual arts and theatrical elements creating a multisensory art experience. The study aims to analyse kamishibai as a tool for reading engagement based on the experiences. Altogether 139 primary school children participated in kamishibai-project in their schools or ECE-groups. The data of the study were collected via a questionnaire containing Likert-scale questions, images and an open field. The research was quantitative and statistical methods were used in the analysis. The results showed that there were statistically reliable connections between kamishibai and performing as well as reading. The results show that kamishibai is a very open and versatile tool for holistic and arts-based literature education and it allows children choose assignments based on their personal interests and skills. Furthermore, the study results show that even those children with reluctance to performing and

reading found kamishibai engaging. This was also the case among multilingual children. The data were collected after two to four week kamishibai projects and more research is needed on longer lasting projects implementing kamishibai as an educational artefact. Furthermore, there are other similar arts-based artefacts, which should also be tested and implemented similarly. However, the results of this study are very positive in regard to the implementation of kamishibai in educational contexts and illustrates the significance of arts-based approaches to language and literature education.

Keywords: kamishibai, arts-based literature education, storytelling, holistic learning, reading engagement

INTRODUCTION

Interest and pleasure in reading and literacy skills, according to reading assessment tests, have diminished over the last decade (Mullis, Martin, & Sainsbury, 2015). However, whether we consider academic skills, emotional development or coping with life in general, the importance of literature and literacy skills in children's and adolescents' development is undeniable. Multiple research results (Allington & Gabriel, 2012; Cremin, Mottram, Collins, Powell, & Safford, 2014) suggest that there is a link between motivation, literacy, readership, children's self-esteem and school achievement in general. By adding positive reading experiences and improving literacy competencies, we can prevent exclusion and promote children's well-being (Aerila & Kauppinen, 2019; Kauppinen & Aerila, 2020).

Students enjoy reading literature as part of different school subjects and feel that literature motivates the learning of different content, enhances students' active participation in learning, stimulates creativity and prepares them for voluntary reading (Siaj & Farrah, 2018). However, this kind of reading engagement relies heavily on learners' agency and the perceived significance of texts (Rogers & Motzley-Wetzel, 2013). There is a need to actively create compose these kinds of activities, which are based on learners' cooperation, problem-solving processes and creativity.

This study is part of the IKI-StoRe project (2019–2021), which is funded by the Finnish Ministry of Culture and Education. StoRe is an abbreviation for “Stories Make Readers”. This project aims to create pedagogical innovations to reading engagement in different contexts and to learners of first, second and foreign languages. The StoRe project has several subprojects. In the IKI-StoRe project (IKI = Innovative Approaches to Language Education), the meaningfulness of reading is pursued by versatile arts-based activities and by creating arts- and literature-based approaches to holistic literature and language education.

Prior research (Siaj & Farrah, 2018) indicates that connecting literature and language education is beneficial since it enhances communication and language use in classrooms. Furthermore, it provides students with authentic material, which leads to richer vocabulary, reading engagement, cultural knowledge and better reading and language skills (Siaj & Farrah, 2018). Arts-based activities and holistic literature learning enable children to work at their own

pace and in their own ways (Kauppinen & Aerila, 2020). Through the arts, children can create interpretations of literature that are visible to themselves and others (Aerila, 2010).

Different forms of arts-based pedagogical approaches indirectly promote language learning and engagement in reading, unlike traditional classroom learning in which the teacher's control is high and student participation is minimal (Shanti & Jaafar, 2020). According to Shanti and Jaafar (2020), since arts-based activities provide students with many options, they have a significant impact on reluctant or weak learners' willingness to participate. Being part of a team and preparing for a performance makes the students work harder and understand that, for example, fluency is not just about reading words quickly but also that the ability to express oneself is vital (Shantni & Jaafar, 2020; Aerila & Kauppinen, 2019). Connecting reading and language acquisition with performance is effective because the students interact actively, have conversations and share their thoughts during the orientation process. Students use their language in reading and oral presentations as they perform and listening skills as they participate in the audience (Karabag, 2015). Fear of speaking in front of peers is a hindrance to learning a language, especially among second and foreign languages. Being part of a performance creates a need for communication, encourages students to participate more and raises their confidence (Radzi, Othman & Radzi, 2020).

This study investigates *kamishibai*'s role in innovative and multilingual language and literature education. *Kamishibai* (紙芝居) is a native Japanese art form and means 'Paper Theatre'. *Kamishibai* is well known in several countries, such as Australia, China, India, Sri Land and Thailand (Ibanez, 2017); however, it is rarely used in European countries or in language education, although the benefits of *kamishibai* in education contexts are evident.

Kamishibai can offer an effective way to tell stories and introduce literature to children (Orbaugh, 2012). Ibanez (2017) described *kamishibai* as a form of children's theatre, which encourages reading, offers a form of theatre performance, provides new aspects to ancient art forms and appreciates the work of storytellers. Additionally, it is a form of both visual and performative culture and a way to preserve Japanese culture and involve students in other cultural heritages. Performing *kamishibai* requires group work and negotiation skills. *Kamishibai* is a highly open artefact with a wide range of forms for pedagogical implementation. In general, the artefacts differ in their pedagogical use and to what extent the interaction of human actors, material artefacts and working conditions may influence educational innovation (Vermeir & Kelchtermans, 2020). As *kamishibai* is an open artefact, it is easily transformed to different contexts. Therefore, *kamishibai* calls for changes in learning and teaching practices.

In this current study, teachers of 6- to 12-year-old children used a *kamishibai* theatre, some ready-made stories and a short course on using *kamishibai*. The teachers participating to the study were free to use *kamishibai* in their lessons according to the learning objectives and their own plans. This study's research questions are as follows:

1. What were the experiences of students in using the *kamishibai* theatre?
2. Is there a connection between the *kamishibai* experience and reading and performing experiences? What are these connections?

3. Are there differences in age, gender and native language between students' experiences?
What are these differences?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Kamishibai combines theatrical elements and storytelling

Kamishibai originates from street performances. It is an art form that can also be followed by illiterate people (Ibanez, 2017). *Kamishibai* has had educational, religious and military propaganda purposes and in many forms: published, hand-made and electronic (Ibanez, 2017). *Kamishibai* combines aspects of Japanese theatrical and storytelling traditions with early cinematic media techniques from abroad. It has almost the same elements as a traditional theatre since it includes characters and narration; however, in contrast to traditional theatre, the performance is presented by images, performance, voice and sound effects produced by the storyteller or by musical instruments (Susilana et al., 2021). *Kamishibai* is a vital part of Japanese cultural heritage, and UNESCO has tried to preserve it (Ibanez, 2017).

Kamishibai, in its original form, consists of three components: a narrator (*kamishibaiya*), a stage (*kamishibai*) and an illustrated story that involves 10 to 15 pictures on separate cards. The narrator sits or stands next to the stage and tells a story. There is a slot the side of the stage through which the narrator can place the cards onto the stage. The stage often includes a curtain that can be closed between different scenes (Lee, 2003; Orbaugh, 2018; Aerila, Lähteelä, Kauppinen, & Siipola, 2021). The traditional card size for pictures is 38 cm x 27 cm. Both sides of the card are needed in *kamishibai*. One side has a coloured picture that is shown to the audience, and the other side contains a text to be read by the storyteller in the performance. The back of the card might contain a small copy of the picture on the front.

The script of a *kamishibai* story consists of cards arranged by the plot. The images for the cards can be taken from many sources. In environmental studies, *kamishibai* stories are implemented by taking photographs of an environment and are used to create a plot based on the photos (Susilana et al., 2021). In the *kamishibai* performance, the storyteller's face is pointing towards the audience and the whole performance encourages interaction (Lee, 2003).

Figure 1. *Kamishibai* stage and cards

The emphasis in *kamishibai* is on visual and performance aspects, not on script (Ibanez, 2019). *Kamishibai* is a multisensory path to comprehension and enjoyment. There are sound effects of the musical instruments and the performer's voice, the touch of other children's bodies in the audience, and the visual appearance of the pictures, storyteller and overall experience. The multisensory arts experience can be strengthened by songs and colourful and appealing picture cards. Additionally, the speed and rhythm with which the picture cards are pulled from the frame are relevant. Some performers move the card up and down. This adds to visual and auditory experiences (Orbaugh, 2012). According to Ibanez (2019), "in *kamishibai* the hearts of the

audience and viewers are unified” (p. 26). By this, he means the *kyokan* world, which is created in *kamishibai* performances through the sharing of emotions (Paatela-Nieminen, 2008).

Kamishibai as an educational artefact

Kamishibai offers educators an alternative way of telling stories to children. Susilana et al. (2021) investigated the benefits of using *kamishibai* in traditional storytelling. According to them, *kamishibai* is easier to watch and read than conventional picture books; it facilitates interactive storytelling, is more in-depth than just listening to stories and is an easy way to learn foreign languages, history, culture and other content. It develops presentation skills, is visually compelling and demonstrates and develops social skills (Susilana et al., 2021). At its best, from the perspective of the effectiveness of language education, it combines writing, speaking, drawing, performing and listening (Aerila et al., 2021).

Kamishibai is widely used in education as a tool for arts- and narrative-based learning. One advantage of the *kamishibai* method is its flexibility. It combines several art forms and enables children to express their creativity as they wish. *Kamishibai* can be combined with music, sound effects, dancing or other movements. In particular, the narrator’s roles and the participation of the audience have large variations concerning implementation. Additionally, the performance can be a single word and a picture of a series of stories and pictures. A *kamishibai* story can come from many sources: it can be a traditional folktale or a children’s story that is prewritten by the performers or improvised during the performance. The pedagogical possibilities vary according to the character of the chosen story. The picture cards used in *kamishibai* can be ready-made *kamishibai* story cards, art images, children’s drawings or any convenient image (Aerila et al., 2021). If the pictures are created on framed tissue paper, *kamishibai* can be turned into a shadow theatre (Lähteelä, 2021).

Previous studies on *kamishibai* (Vermeir & Kelchtermans 2020) show that educators use *kamishibai* in different ways. For some, *kamishibai* is a multi-tool. This means that teachers create their versions of *kamishibai*, let the children perform and create their own kinds of presentations and use *kamishibai*, for example, with puppets. Some teachers prefer to maintain *kamishibai*’s original purpose and are concerned that the magic around *kamishibai* will disappear.

Whatever *Kamishibai*’s actual form or usage, participation requires spatial, logical, linguistic, kinesthetic, interpersonal (Lee, 2003) and teamwork skills. In Vermeir and Kelchtermans’s (2020) study, *kamishibai*’s pedagogical use was especially useful for children with weak language skills or problems with language. Therefore, *kamishibai* stimulates the language development of foreign and second languages (Katagiri, 2019).

From the perspective of language awareness, *kamishibai* theatre’s many elements support the understanding of the story and enhances learning the vocabulary (Aerila et al., 2021). A language-aware instruction boosts students to observe language and language use in different situations and supports the development of linguistic and content skills in an overlapping manner (Garcia, 2008). In general, *kamishibai* works well in culturally diverse groups (Katagiri, 2019). *Kamishibai* stories can be used to address differences and similarities between different cultures,

as images help children understand this, and the proximity of the *kamishibai* narrator to the audience creates a safe space (Katagiri, 2019). *Kamishibai* brings the illusion of theatre to lessons and enhances the empathetic use of language. During a performance, it is easy to show and experience different emotions and the joy of a group's common experience (Kauppinen & Aerila, 2020).

The more active the storyteller, the more that *kamishibai* supports the audience's language acquisition. This means the storyteller is a vital part of the performance, with emphasis on gestures, facial expression and voice tones. (Vermeir & Kelchtermans, 2020.) For the viewer, the pedagogical *kamishibai* performance appears as a theatre that directs attention and helps the audience focus on listening (Lee, 2003). The narrator's empathetic presentation of the story tells viewers about the narrator's interpretation while supporting an understanding of both the image(s) and the text. (Aerila et al., 2021) Telling a story and being a part of a *kamishibai* performance gives the experience of being a part of a presentation (Vermeir & Kelchtermans, 2020).

Many students fear directly engaging to an audience, but teamwork in *kamishibai* performances can lower this tension and may enhance significant development in performance skills and coping with tension (Shanti & Jaafar, 2020). In this way, *kamishibai* safely gives children a feeling of performance tension (Lee, 2003).

According to Shanti and Jaafal (2020), connecting reading and language acquisition to theatrical group activities is effective because it enhances students' interactions and use of language. Additionally, it makes rehearsing reading skills more motivating. To succeed in a team's performance, students are willing to read a text multiple times and practice independently on their own time. Also, early childhood educators have found that even the smallest children enjoy *kamishibai* stories and stay calm during *kamishibai* time (Vermeir & Kelchtermans, 2020).

RESEARCH METHOD

Aims and scope

In this study, we present the experiences of using *kamishibai* in Finnish primary education as they were evaluated by the participating students. This study aims to illustrate *kamishibai* in education from the students' point of view. The experiences of the educational use of *kamishibai* are compared to the students' experiences of reading and performing in general. The purpose is to investigate the possibilities of *kamishibai* in language and literature education.

Progress of the study

In this study, *kamishibai* is treated as a pedagogical innovation. This innovation is often conducted in three phases: adoption, implementation and institutionalisation. The adoption phase refers to the decision to accept innovative goals and commit to putting them into practice. The enactment of teaching and learning practices is called the implementation process. Institutionalisation means that the innovative practice becomes the new normal (Giles & Hargreaves, 2006).

This study's data were collected during the implementation phase of the innovation process. However, before implementation, all the teachers (N = 10) who participated in this study also engaged in a short course on *kamishibai* during autumn 2020 and spring 2021. The adoption was planned and led by the researchers. It involved a *kamishibai* performance, presenting the elements of *kamishibai* and a lecture on the pedagogical aspects of using *kamishibai*. At the end of that short course, the teachers were offered the opportunity to borrow a *kamishibai* stage and two ready-made *kamishibai* stories (cards and text) for two to four weeks. The teachers agreed to participate in this study, collect data from the students and document the implementation of *kamishibai*.

We were keen on the students' experiences as a part of putting pedagogical innovation into operation. It develops via a negotiation process that determines to what extent *kamishibai* users (e.g., teachers and students) can influence the artefact's interpretations and uses. In *kamishibai*, this negotiation space is large: users can have several meanings for and uses of the artefact (Vermeir & Kelchtermans, 2020).

In this study, *kamishibai* was used in language lessons, and the researcher did not limit its use. The only limitations were the time limitations of the school and the objectives of curricula to restrict the implementations. Implementing the *kamishibai* varied from only teachers presenting ready-made stories to holistic multi-art projects in which the children wrote their own *kamishibai* stories and illustrated them with a variety of fine-art techniques.

Participants

This study's participants were Finnish primary school children (N = 139) from grades 1–5 (aged 6–12 years). Half (48.9%) of the children were from the first two grades and half (50.7%) were from grades three to five. They are mostly from Finnish-speaking families; however, 15.1% of them are from multilingual families and do not speak Finnish at home. Children were asked about their gender: 39.6% are girls, 28.8% are boys and 2.2% are non-binary. First graders (29.5%) were not asked about their gender. The participants of the study consists of teachers who participated in national literature education programmes under the @StoRE method

This study examined its participants as a whole and in smaller groups formed according to the children's language background, age and gender. Participation in this study was voluntary, and the participants remained anonymous. They could withdraw from the study at any point. If a student or his/her parents declined to participate in the study, the student could still participate in the *kamishibai* project.

Data collection and analysis

After the *kamishibai* interventions, the students completed a survey about their experiences with *kamishibai*. It was a pilot survey, and consisted of questions about their reading habits as well as their reading and performing preferences and experiences in the school context. The pilot survey consisted of 14 questions and it was based on previous studies of the researchers (Lähteelä et al.

2019). Their experiences of *kamishibai* (four questions; f.e. the feelings during the *kamishibai*-project and the willingness to participate to future *kamishibai*-projects) reading (seven questions; f.e. relations to different genres and to different pedagogical approaches in reading and literature) and performing (one question; Do you like performing?) were investigated using questions on a Likert scale of 1–4 (1 = very much, 2 = a little, 3 = not really, 4 = not at all), and the activities implemented during *kamishibai* lessons were investigated with images (e.g., writing, drawing pictures, storytelling, creating a story, listening to the teacher read a story, listening to their peers reading a story and collaborating with peers). Further, the pilot survey consisted of an open field in which the children could draw or write the most interesting or motivating details or elements of *kamishibai* projects. The pictures were classified based on what the children had written or drawn on the open field: the most common elements were drawing, cooperation with peers and presenting *kamishibai*. The pilot survey was short enough for the youngest students to answer, and the answers were supported by images.

The answers to the Likert scale questions and the images were analysed using *IBM SPSS Statistics 25* and a Chi-squared test. The Chi-squared test was used for comparing girls to boys, Finnish-speaking students to multilingual students and young children (grades 1–2) to older children (grades 3–5). The open-field questions were first classified via content analysis and the classifications were quantified.

RESULTS

Students' positive experiences with kamishibai

The analyses of the questions showed that most of the children liked *kamishibai*, as 83.3% of the students stated that they liked it very much or liked it somewhat. Approximately half (55.8%) also wanted to participate in *kamishibai* theatre activities again. The majority of students (63.8%) wanted to see and hear more *kamishibai* presentations. It is noteworthy that positive experiences of *kamishibai* were not related to age, gender or native language, since over 80.0% of the students in all the groups like *kamishibai*, and the majority wanted to participate again in *kamishibai* activities, and see and hear more *kamishibai* (see Table 1).

Table 1. Overall *kamishibai* experiences

	Grades 1–2		Grades 3–5		Chi-squared test		Fisher's exact test
	n	%	n	%	$\chi^2(1)$	p	p
Likes <i>kamishibai</i>	66	90.9%	63	85.7%	0.846	0.358	-
Wants to participate again in <i>kamishibai</i> activities	61	68.9%	54	63.0%	0.443	0.506	-
Wants to see and hear more <i>kamishibai</i>	59	84.7%	55	67.3%	4.808	0.028*	-
	Girls		Boys				

Likes <i>kamishibai</i>	52	88.5%	35	82.9%	-	-	0.533
Wants to participate again in <i>kamishibai</i> activities	47	74.5%	31	58.1%	2.308	0.129	-
Wants to see and hear more <i>kamishibai</i>	46	80.4%	34	67.6%	1.705	0.192	-
		Children from multilingual families		Children from Finnish-speaking families			
Likes <i>kamishibai</i>	18	83.3%	101	88.1%	-	-	0.698
Wants to participate again in <i>kamishibai</i> activities	14	50.0%	91	68.1%	-	-	0.229
Wants to see and hear more <i>kamishibai</i>	16	68.8%	91	78.0%	-	-	0.522

* Statistically significant difference, $p < 0.05$

The teachers offered several *kamishibai* activities to their students. The students could write, draw pictures, tell their own stories, create stories and pictures, listen to the teacher read a story, listen to their peers read a story, and collaborate with their peers. Usually (64.2%), the students named four to six activities ($Md = 5$). The most common activity, according to the students, was drawing pictures. When analysing the activities related to enjoying *kamishibai*, collaborating with peers seemed to correlate with positive experiences. Most of the children (78.6%) who had collaborated with their peers wanted to participate in the *kamishibai* activities again, whereas, of the children who did not collaborate during the *kamishibai* process, only 41.7% wanted to participate again ($p = 0.013$). Similarly, 81.4% of the children who collaborated wanted to see and hear more *kamishibai*, and 50.0% of those who did not collaborate wanted the same ($p = 0.041$).

Drawing pictures was the most popular activity, as 42 children described it as being the best thing about *kamishibai*. Two-thirds of those children are girls (66.7%), one-third are boys (31.0%) and 2.4% are non-binary. The second most common answer was collaborating with peers, which was mentioned by 20 children, of whom 70% are girls, 20% are boys and 10% are non-binary. The third most common activity was presenting *kamishibai*, which 15 children enjoyed; 53.3% are girls, 40.0% are boys and 6.7% are non-binary. Children also enjoyed storytelling, writing, listening to the story and watching the story. Four children said that they do not know what was best about *kamishibai*, and only two children said nothing was fun about *kamishibai*. Regarding gender and favourite activities, the girls mentioned more favourite activities concerning *kamishibai* than the boys.

Although some *kamishibai* activities were more popular amongst the whole group than others, it is worth mentioning that, altogether, 14 favourite activities were mentioned. This may indicate how arts-based and holistic activities have the power to appeal to children's different interests and needs. In this way, they enable versatile experiences of agency and choice. The activities varied from small individual activities to the entire group's overall experience. The students mentioned, for example, the task of opening the curtains between scenes, colouring the images on the picture cards, drawing a spaceship and the possibility to plan the presentation freely

with classmates. The open-field data specifies the children's favourite activities concerning *kamishibai* (see Figure 1). The most common activities are large-lettered, and the less common become smaller letters.

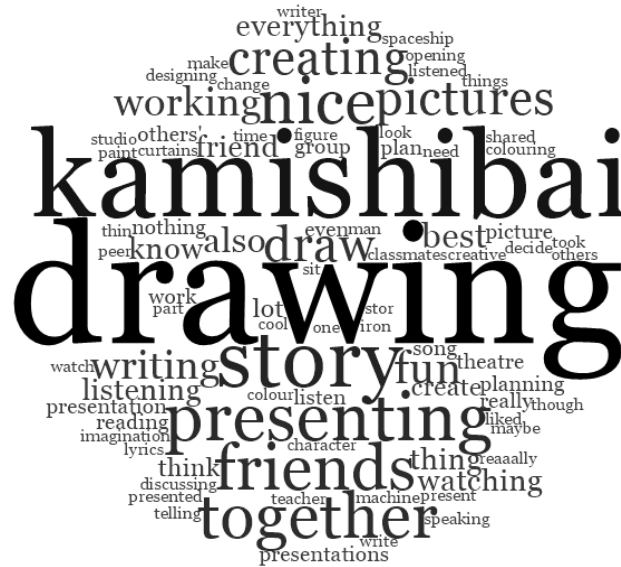


Figure 1. The open-field answers of the most motivating or interesting *kamishibai* activities

Kamishibai experiences in relation to experiences of reading and performing

To investigate *kamishibai*'s meaning regarding students' reading and performing, the students' reading habits and reading and performance preferences and experiences in the school context were investigated. Figure 2 illustrates that most of the students like to read books (89.9%), perform (59.9%), listen to their teacher read aloud (83.3%), write (77.7%) and create stories (73.5%). Also, the students felt that they often found something to read in their classroom (69.8%). In any case, half of them revealed that they did not like reading aloud at school (53.2%). Comparing the large number of the students who liked the *kamishibai* activities (83.3%) to their reading and performing preferences and experiences, it seems that *kamishibai* was also enjoyed among those who do not like reading, performing or reading aloud.

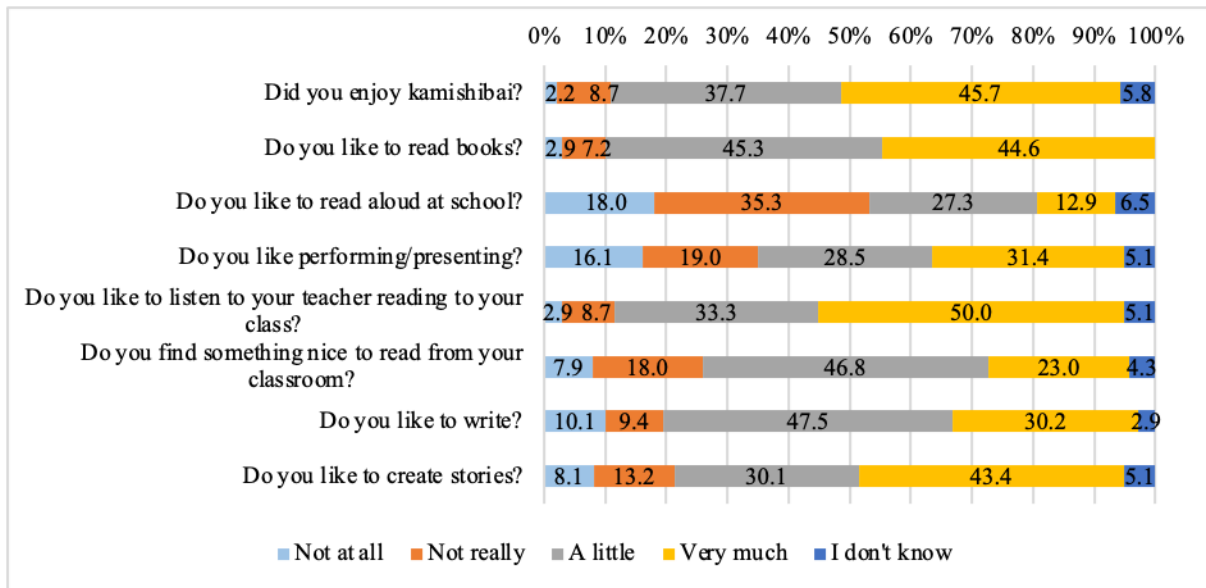


Figure 2. Students' experiences with kamishibai, and reading and performing preferences

Although all the students enjoyed *kamishibai* and there was only a slight difference between genders, some statistically significant differences between boys and girls were found regarding likes and dislikes. The girls liked performing/presenting, writing and creating stories more than the boys did (see Table 2). Overall, the trend appears that boys do not like activities at school as much as girls do. The same result was seen in the open-field answers regarding the most motivating or interesting aspect of *kamishibai* (see Figure 4). This could indicate that *kamishibai* activities may support the engagement of boys in these areas and compensate for the differences between genders since during *kamishibai* projects, the students were involved in activities that boys do not enjoy.

Table 2. Likes and dislikes concerning *kamishibai* activities between girls and boys

	Girls		Boys		Chi-squared test		Fisher's exact test
	n	%	n	%	$\chi^2(1)$	p	p
Likes <i>kamishibai</i>	52	88.5%	35	82.9%	-	-	0.533
Likes to read books	55	92.7%	40	80.0%	3.399	0.065	-
Likes to read aloud at school	53	43.4%	37	27.0%	2.514	0.113	-
Likes performing/presenting	52	82.7%	37	51.4%	10.048	0.002*	-
Likes listening to the teacher read aloud	52	90.4%	36	80.6%	-	-	0.218
Finds something to read in the classroom	53	77.4%	38	60.5%	3.005	0.083	-
Likes writing	53	88.7%	39	66.7%	6.643	0.010*	-
Likes to create stories	48	89.6%	39	69.2%	5.669	0.017*	-

* Statistically significant difference, $p < 0.05$

Students' preferences for reading and performing activities varied according to the students' age (see Table 3). The young students enjoyed more conventional reading activities at school, such as reading books, reading aloud, and listening to the teacher read aloud. Students enjoyed these reading activities less with age. There was a statistically significant difference in reading engagement, reading aloud and listening to the teacher read. However, this trend was not visible in the enjoyment of *kamishibai* activities. According to the data, *kamishibai* is still liked among older students, even though it involves reading, reading aloud and listening to someone read aloud.

Table 3. Preference for reading and performing activities

	Grades 1–2		Grades 3–5		Chi-squared test	
	n	%	n	%	$\chi^2(1)$	p
Likes <i>kamishibai</i>	66	90.9 %	63	85.7 %	0.846	0.358
Likes to read books	68	97.1 %	70	82.9 %	7.632	0.006*
Likes to read aloud at school	65	52.3 %	64	32.8 %	5.011	0.025*
Likes performing/presenting	62	59.7 %	67	65.7 %	0.495	0.482
Likes to listen to the teacher read aloud	66	95.5 %	64	79.7 %	7.484	0.006*
Finds something to read in the classroom	65	78.5 %	67	67.2 %	2.123	0.145
Likes writing	68	79.4 %	66	80.3 %	0.017	0.898
Likes to create stories	63	71.4 %	65	83.1 %	2.477	0.116

* Statistically significant difference, $p < 0.05$

Children from multilingual families tended to like reading and performing activities at school less often than other children (see Table 4). According to the data, they do not like to read books, perform/present, listen to the teacher read aloud, and they do not find suitable reading in their classroom as often as children from Finnish-speaking families. All of these differences are statistically significant and indicate that there is a need to improve the literacy pedagogy of multilingual students in Finland in general. Since multilingual and Finnish-speaking students liked *kamishibai* activities, *kamishibai* might be a pedagogical tool for this development process.

Table 4. Preference for reading and performing activities of multilingual students compared to Finnish-speaking students

	Children from multilingual families		Children from Finnish-speaking families		Chi-squared test		Fisher's exact test
	n	%	n	%	$\chi^2(1)$	p	p
Likes <i>kamishibai</i>	18	83.3%	101	88.1%	-	-	0.698
Likes to read books	21	52.4 %	105	96.2%	-	-	< 0.001*
Likes to read aloud at school	19	42.%	100	42.0%	< 0.001	0.993	-
Likes performing/presenting	19	42.1%	99	68.7%	4.913	0.027*	-
Likes to listen to the teacher read aloud	20	70.0%	98	91.8 %	-	-	0.014*
Finds something to read in the classroom	20	50.0%	100	75.0%	5.042	0.025*	-

Likes writing	19	78.9%	104	78.8%	-	-	1.000
Likes to create stories	18	72.2%	99	75.8%	-	-	0.770

* Statistically significant difference, $p < 0.05$

CONCLUSION

This study involved Finnish students' learning experiences of *kamishibai*. *Kamishibai* was treated as an educational artefact that is not traditionally used in Finland. It enables pedagogical innovations in language and literature learning and boosts holistic and arts-based ways of studying different content in classrooms.

In this study, students from 6–12 years old liked *kamishibai* activities regardless of their age, gender or native language. However, some differences in the experiences of these groups were seen and are therefore relevant to the pedagogical use of *kamishibai*. In summary, *kamishibai* contains elements that might support reading engagement, developing reading skills and empowering young people in performing. Amongst the Finnish students, the most attractive activities in *kamishibai* were drawing, performing and cooperation with peers. The students who preferred to collaborate with their peers wanted to participate again in *kamishibai* activities.

The meaningfulness of the *kamishibai* process seems to lie, at least partly, in cooperative working methods. The students mentioned a number of activities they prefer in *kamishibai* processes. This shows how the activities can meet students' diverse interests and needs. Furthermore, *kamishibai* seems to enable many kinds of experiences of agency and choice. Studying the likes and dislikes of *kamishibai* according to gender, the girls mentioned a greater number popular activities than the boys. Reading, reading aloud, and listening to someone read aloud were preferred as part of the *kamishibai* activities among both younger and older students.

It seems that *kamishibai* is a multi-tool, which means that many activities may be incorporated into *kamishibai* projects. In *kamishibai* projects, children can make choices and choose activities based on their interests and interact with each other freely. The results of these studies highlight the importance of teamwork and active agency in language learning. They are the source of positive learning experiences. These results are supported by previous studies on arts-based and holistic learning in general (Aerila, Rönkkö, & Grönman, 2019; Aerila et al., 2021) and other arts-based pedagogical approaches (Sunday, McClure, & Schulte, 2014).

We feel that learners' pedagogical freedom (i.e., the possibility of making choices and interacting with others) is one reason for the positive experiences among students, with more negative experiences in reading-related activities and performing in general. This study's main result is that *kamishibai* and other arts-based pedagogical approaches with similar freedom might support the motivation, learning and positive experiences of more reluctant and weak readers. This freedom might also enhance students' ability to differentiate the learning paths suitable for themselves and to learn on their own level while in cooperation with peers.

It needs time to get familiar with pedagogical innovation by students and teachers. While *kamishibai* was used at schools only couple of weeks, the applying time became very brief. As an educational innovation, *kamishibai* called for schools, teachers and students to change and produce new, partly unexpected applications to the *kamishibai*. (see Vermeir & Kelchtermans, 2020 on pedagogical innovation process). This has potentially affected the results, as the implementation practices varied according to the agents.

To make *kamishibai* enjoyable to students in the future, the pedagogical use of *kamishibai* must be planned carefully and ensure that *kamishibai* activities continue to be challenging and involve new elements. In this way, *kamishibai*, as an educational artefact, can be institutionalised into classrooms. This would also mean a conscious work for pedagogy around *kamishibai* and other similar arts-based educational artefacts and activities. The use of *kamishibai* may increase the interest in using other artefacts, storytelling methods or culturally relevant practices at school (Vermeir & Kelchtermans, 2020).

Kamishibai and other similar arts-based pedagogical approaches are powerful tools in all students' education. Besides bringing motivation, engagement and improved learning results to different contents, they bring individual and common experiences of joy and success to the students. Positive emotions in learning situations and natural spaces for social–emotional learning are also offered. The possibilities of arts-based activities are almost limitless, and *kamishibai* is one example of how effective educational artefacts may exist in our cultural heritage.

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