# Use of Audiobooks in a School Library and Positive Effects of Struggling Readers' Participation in a Library-Sponsored Audiobook Club

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## Abstract

*A study was conducted to determine the impact of the use of audiobooks with struggling readers in a school library audiobook club. The participants met weekly in the school library with the school librarian and researchers to discuss audiobooks and make reading recommendations to their peers. Standardized test data as well as pre- and post-study interviews and surveys, teacher questionnaires, parent questionnaires, and student interviews were analyzed. The findings indicated that struggling readers' use of audiobooks had a positive impact on reading skills and attitudes toward reading. These findings are significant given the dearth of research directly related to the impact of audiobooks, despite the prevalent usage of audiobooks.*

## Introduction

### Reasons for Interest in Subject of Study

Classroom use of audio recordings has long been a viable instructional intervention for struggling readers (Carbo 1978; Gilbert, Williams, and McLaughlin 1996). The increased interest in using such an intervention could be directly tied to the increased access and popularity of audiobooks. Technological innovations, combined with the marketability of audiobooks, have led to a drastic increase in the offerings of traditionally print resources through electronic media, including audiobooks (King-Sears, Swanson, and Mainzer 2011). The popularity of audiobooks has exploded in the past decade with audiobook publishing expanding into a billion-dollar industry. According to figures released in 2010, consumers purchased 900,000 more audiobooks in 2009 than in 2008, a 4.7 percent increase in unit sales (Benson 2011). Additionally,

audiobooks for children and teens make up 17 percent of the audiobook market (Audio Publishers Association 2009); according to a recent survey, 19 percent of teens reported downloading an audiobook (Milliot 2010). The popularity of audiobooks continues to expand. Todd Ogasawara (2011) noted that audiobook download sales for the month of February 2011 had increased 36.7 percent over sales for February 2010.

With the increased popularity, access, and availability of high-quality children's literature in an audio format, educators are now increasingly interested in the validity of the use of audiobooks in literacy instruction.

## Statement of the Problem

Reading comprehension and interest are essential in learning. The act of reading permits students to learn new vocabulary and concepts and to access different types of reading materials (Serafini 2004). If students fall behind in reading comprehension for their age/grade level, then students struggle to process new vocabulary and concepts presented in textbooks and other literature. Difficulty in reading may translate into poor school performance due to the inability to process new vocabulary and concepts in a meaningful manner. These difficulties can evolve into students' losing interest in reading and entering a state of learned helplessness. This cycle can lead to students' dropping out of high school and possessing below-average reading comprehension skills as adults.

## Purpose and Significance of the Study

The purpose of the study is to increase reading skills and improve students' attitudes toward reading by creating an audiobook club for struggling readers. Researchers have demonstrated that the use of technology exposes struggling readers to different types of literature and assists with vocabulary acquisition (Marchionda 2001; Stone-Harris 2008). The significance of the study is its demonstrating that the use of audiobooks can lead to an improvement in struggling readers' skills and attitudes. If use of audiobooks can be proven to benefit struggling readers, then educators will possess another instructional technique to assist struggling readers improve their reading skills and attitudes.

# Review of Literature

## Audiobooks

Frank Serafini (2004) has explained that much research validates the importance of reading aloud to students, positing that the act of reading aloud introduces new vocabulary and concepts, provides a fluent model, and allows students access to literature they are unable to read independently. He adds that audiobooks are an important component of a comprehensive reading program. Kylene Beers (1998) has said that audiobooks, when used with reluctant, struggling, or second language learners, serve as a scaffold that allows students to read beyond their reading level. The use of audiobooks is a natural extension of the assisted-reading strategy used with struggling students. Audiobooks expose struggling readers to something they have never experienced before by allowing them to experience what fluent readers have every time they read a book (Stone-Harris 2008). Since the reading process develops through oral language experiences, audiobooks benefit struggling readers by increasing comprehension and

appreciation of written text (Wolfson 2008). This benefit has long been seen by classroom teachers.

## Assisted Reading with Audiobooks

The use of audio recording as an instructional intervention can be traced back to a strategy known as assisted reading. The process of assisted reading begins with having students listen to an audio recording of a text selection, following along with the teacher as the teacher reads the selection, and then reading the text independently (Gilbert, Williams, and McLaughlin 1996). Melanie R. Kuhn and Steven A. Stahl (2003) predicted that assisted reading, or reading along while hearing a fluent audio-recording model, would resurface as a feasible approach to fluency instruction and as a method of improving student attitudes toward reading.

Assisted reading is designed to serve as an intervention rather than the primary mode of literacy instruction (Esteves and Whitten 2011) and serves as a scaffold (Vygotsky 1978) that allows students to read at an independent reading level. Kelli J. Esteves and Elizabeth Whitten (2011) have stated that the mode of delivery for assisted reading has changed through the years from human delivery, to audiotape, to compact disc, to Playaway devices, to digital downloads.

However, whatever medium is used, research findings attest to the assertion that assisted reading increases reading fluency, which leads to greater comprehension for struggling readers. Renee Michelet Casbergue and Karen H. Harris (1996) have asserted that assisted reading helps make the reading act more pleasurable by supplying students with a variety of literature read by fluent models. Assisted reading for self-selected texts better enables struggling readers to absorb storylines, attend to plot, and, as previously stated, listen to a fluent model (Carbo 2005). All of this evidence supported by previous research on assisted reading lends credence to the use of audiobooks in a balanced reading program (Esteves and Whitten 2011).

## Authentic Literature

Perhaps the best reason for the use of audiobooks as an intervention with struggling readers is access to high-quality self-selected children's literature. Kelli J. Esteves and Elizabeth Whitten believe that "experiences with authentic literature and exposure to good books is a necessary part of any effective reading program" (2011, 34). Since struggling readers are often intimidated by these types of books, finding ways to make these texts accessible is important. Sayra Stone-Harris (2008) found that teachers often used audiobooks to expose struggling readers to literature genres that would have been inaccessible through written text alone.

Kylene Beers (1998) has said that audiobooks provide struggling readers access to the plot structures, themes, and vocabulary of more difficult literature. Further, audiobooks help students develop a positive attitude toward reading. Denise Marchionda (2001) has suggested that this positive attitude developed from the successful completion of an audiobook instills a reading habit and helps to develop lifelong readers. While exposure to authentic literature is important, it is also only one of the many aspects of a successful reading program.

## Fluency

Improving fluency has recently received much scrutiny as a common component of reading programs, especially in the case of struggling readers. These readers often read in a disconnected and non-rhythmic manner, a circumstance that creates a barrier to comprehension (Hudson,

Lane, and Pullen 2005; Hasbrouck 2006). Marie Carbo has told us that fluent readers read, "rapidly, accurately, and with good expression" (2005, 48). The ability to read at the appropriate rate with reasonable accuracy, expression, and phrasing is a significant part of understanding and enjoying text (Ekstrand 2011). The skill of reading fluently is often difficult for struggling readers because they are dealing with text on a word-by-word basis and never move to reading in a fluid manner. One of the cornerstones of fluency instruction is a solid, fluent model. Marie Carbo (2005) has suggested that good fluency instruction provides fluid models, uses a variety of assisted readings—including recorded books—and provides high-level reading materials in both text and audio formats.

Renee Michelet Casbergue and Karen H. Harris (1996) have suggested that the oral example provided through audiobooks enables students to not only better understand the story but also be exposed to instances of modeled fluency. Marie Carbo has written that audio recordings help students "to integrate the rate, rhythm, and natural flow of language necessary for good comprehension" (1978, 267).

## Vocabulary

A myriad of vocabulary strategies are available for classroom instruction. Marie Carbo (2005) has suggested that some of the best strategies for vocabulary development encourage students to discuss words and provide readings of materials that familiarize students with a large range of high-level words. Warwick B. Elley (1989) states that reading aloud to children increases their vocabularies. The use of audiobooks is a blend of these strategies. When using audiobooks, students are exposed to a fluent read-aloud model, provided with a variety of high-level words, and encouraged to discuss those words.

Denise Marchionda (2001) has expressed the belief that audiobooks can help with vocabulary acquisition no matter what the reading level. By following along while listening to text containing vocabulary from higher reading and speaking levels, a struggling reader both hears and sees new words, making them more likely to be retained. Reading along with an audiobook on a higher reading level gives a struggling reader the correct spelling, context, and pronunciation, helping the reader determine meaning. This act of reading along with the audiobook forms a bridge for vocabulary development.

## Technology

According to Ann Holum and Jan Gahala, technology is most beneficial when used as an addition to reading; they have said, "When used in conjunction with written texts, audiobooks help children's reading skills" (2001). Amy Benjamin (2005) has highlighted six features of technology, beyond motivation, that support differentiated instruction with the use of technology. One of these features relates to learning styles and sensory learning and stipulates that technology encourages auditory and social learning, a circumstance that encourages learners with different abilities and interests to participate in the learning process.

Julie Kara-Soteriou (2009) has written that audiobooks allow teachers to meet the needs of various learning styles by differentiating instruction for struggling students who might encounter a difficult text and believe it to be boring and unreachable. While audio recordings have in the past been used primarily with struggling readers, audiobooks also allow for the learning styles of average to high-achieving students wishing to read beyond their own level to access more difficult text, explore new genres for literature, or improve fluency.

One of the latest technologies available to librarians and teachers is the Playaway. The Playaway is a self-contained unit resembling an iPod, but the Playaway does not allow for recordings to be deleted, copied, or added. The Playaway is approximately the size of a deck of cards and is virtually indestructible. Sue Fellerer (2009) has described a pilot program implemented in a school library. She found that Playaways were most popular with third-, fourth-, and fifth-grade students. These students began to check out more challenging books and read the entire book.

## Social Aspect of Learning

Over the past few years there has been an increased interest in infusing social skills into the curriculum (Wood, Roser, and Martinez 2001). However, the recent focus on the importance of social interaction and social learning theory is clearly a revisiting of the ideas of Lev Vygotsky (1987) who believed intellectual ability was best developed through participation in joint activities. Through interactions with peers and adults, students are enabled to increase their thinking and learn to communicate that learning with others (Wood, Roser, and Martinez 2001). According to Neil Davidson (1994) cooperative learning models, through dialogue and discussion, increase comprehension and meaning of text. Karen D. Wood, Nancy L. Roser, and Miriam Martinez (2001) have added that, based on research and theory, this social interaction to increase understanding is clearly a necessity in today's classrooms where solitary reading and writing are things of the past.

Heather K. Casey (2008) has written that sociocultural views of learning suggest that literacy development in adolescents is related to social community interactions and understanding of the specific needs of individual students and that book clubs are examples of just such learning communities. Audiobooks used with small groups allow for a community-building experience that promotes discussions (Casbergue and Harris 1996). Frank Serafini has advocated the use of audiobook clubs as a means of allowing students to read independently with support and then discuss the books with classmates. With this support "audiobooks level the playing field, allowing struggling readers to participate in discussion" (2004, 7).

This social interaction is of great importance when working with struggling readers. Heather K. Casey explored the use of learning clubs to motivate struggling learners. She discovered that active engagement serves as a motivator for students to continue interactions with literacy. Additionally, these learning clubs developed peer relationships, and language served as a "vehicle for navigating conversations around literature, literacy, and learning" (2008, 292). Helen Aron (1992) deduced that students who listened to text would discuss and recommend books to their peers, select favorite authors, and replay self-selected passages. Removing the constraints of the reading act for struggling readers provides an opportunity for them to experience the same books as their peers (Wolfson 2008).

While the research reviewed here paints a positive picture of audiobooks and implies the importance of audiobooks, little research directly connecting the use of audiobooks and student achievement could be found. This lack of empirical support led to this research project conducted with fourth- and fifth-grade students, who listened to audiobooks containing authentic literature and, with the assistance of the school librarian, discussed the books with peers in a nonthreatening, social environment.

# Objectives of the Study

The research questions for this study are below.

Question One: Do the use of audiobooks and participation in an audiobook club impact the reading ability of struggling readers?

Question Two: Do the use of audiobooks and participation in an audiobook club affect struggling readers' attitudes toward reading?

The overall goal of this study was to determine if the use of audiobooks could be directly related to the improvement in reading ability and attitudes toward reading. The researchers, while interested in test data, also desired to discover the impact of audiobooks as evidenced by student actions in the library, classroom, and home. This study sought to explore gains or losses in reading ability, the reading practices of struggling readers, and the attitudes of students, teachers, and parents toward the use of audiobooks to assist struggling readers.

# Design of the Study

The design for this study was a mixed methods approach. This approach was selected to obtain quantitative and qualitative data and to triangulate the results to determine whether the participants' use of audiobooks and participation in an audiobook club significantly impacted their reading interest and performance.

## Participants

Twenty-one students in grades 4 and 5 participated in the study. The twenty-one students, plus others that were dropped from the study as described in the "Limitations" subsection, were recruited for the study by their teachers, based upon the students' being a minimum of two grade levels below placement according to the results of the STAR exam and upon the teachers' classroom observations to identify participants lacking the motivation to read.

The school selected for this study was a rural elementary school housing grades K–5 in a local school district near the researchers' university. The researchers chose to use grades 4 and 5 due to the availability of authentic literature for young readers in the form of audiobooks housed in the school's library. These grades were also selected based on the teachers' input that these grades are often the point at which struggling readers get "lost" in the system.

## Materials and Procedures

### Overview

At the beginning of the study, each student participated in an interview consisting of qualitative and quantitative survey questions. Following these pre-study interviews, the participants listened to audiobooks and participated in a book club centered on the audiobooks. The book club began in early September and ended in late May. A mid-point qualitative interview was conducted in January to monitor growth. At the conclusion of the study, researchers again interviewed each participant; this post-participation interview included qualitative and quantitative survey questions. At the end of the study, the researchers also administered parental and teacher surveys to assess changes in participants' attitudes and reading behavior.

### Interview of Participants

To obtain baseline data on participants' reading interests, each participant was interviewed before listening to audiobooks and participating in the school library's audiobook club. During the pre-study interviews, the questions asked centered upon (a) the participants' self-evaluation of their reading skills, (b) their interest in reading, and (c) whether the participants had previously used audiobooks and enjoyed using audiobooks. The questions asked in the pre-study interviews are listed in table 1. In addition, researchers orally asked participants ten items on a quantitative survey (see table 2) to assess their level of agreement or disagreement on a five-point scale; the participants were permitted to ask questions to clarify a statement or word.

| Table 1. Qualitative questions participants were asked during pre-study interview. |
| --- |
| Do you like to read? Why or why not? |
| What kinds of books do you like to read? |
| Have you ever listened to an audiobook? |
| Do you think you will enjoy listening to an audiobook? |
| Are you a good reader? |
| Do you own any audiobooks? |

| Table 2. Quantitative questions participants were asked during pre-study interview and post-participation interview. |
| --- |
| I have access to many types of reading materials. |
| Reading helps me think for myself. |
| Reading makes me feel good about myself. |
| I hope to be a reader my entire life. |
| Reading helps me identify with people who are different than me. |
| Adults in my school help me select reading materials. |
| Adults in my school like to read. |
| Adults in my school can help me improve my reading ability. |
| I always have a choice in what I read. |
| Reading is very important to me. |

## Mid-Point Interview of Participants

Mid-point interviews were conducted with participants. The purpose of the mid-point interviews was to assess (a) whether participants were enjoying the use of audiobooks, and (b) whether participants believed that their listening to audiobooks and participating in an audiobook club were helping improve their reading skills (see table 3).

Table 3. Qualitative questions participants were asked during mid-point interview.

Do you believe listening to audiobooks has improved your reading skills?

Do you enjoy listening to audiobooks? Why or why not?

Do you follow along in the book while you listen? Why or why not?

Has audiobook club helped you? How?

## Post-Participation Interview of Participants

At the conclusion of the study, participants were interviewed again. During the interviews, participants were asked twelve questions that centered upon (a) the participants' self-evaluation of their reading skills, (b) their interest in reading, (c) whether the participants enjoyed using audiobooks, and (d) whether participants believed the use of audiobooks assisted in improving their reading ability (see table 4). In addition, participants were asked questions from a ten-item quantitative survey (see table 2) to assess their level of agreement or disagreement on a five-point scale, and the participants were permitted to ask questions to clarify a statement or word.

Table 4. Qualitative questions participants were asked during post-participation interview.

Do you believe listening to audiobooks has improved your reading skills?

Do you enjoy listening to audiobooks? Why or why not?

Do you follow along in the book while you listen? Why or why not?

Has audiobook club helped you? How?

Are you a good reader?

Do you own any audiobooks?

Was there anything you didn't enjoy about listening to audiobooks?

Was there anything you didn't enjoy about audiobook club?

Would you participate in another audiobook club if it was offered in the future? Why?

Would you encourage your friends to join an audiobook club if it was offered in the future? Why?

What was the best part of being in audiobook club?

What one word best describes your experience in audiobook club?

Are you reading more?

## Surveys of Participants' Parents and Teachers

At the conclusion of the study, brief surveys were sent to participants' guardians and teachers. The purpose of these surveys was to assess whether the guardians and teachers had observed changes in the participants' (a) reading ability, (b) reading confidence, and (c) amount of

reading. This survey also allowed the researchers to get a broader perspective of the ways the students' listening to and discussing audiobooks affected the participants' lives. The questions asked guardians and teachers are listed in table 5.

Table 5. Questions guardians and teachers were asked at the end of the study.

Has listening to audiobooks improved your child's/student's reading skills?

Has audiobook club helped your child/student? If so, can you describe how?

Is your child/student reading more books than they did before audiobook club started? If so, approximately how many?

**Standardized Reading Test Scores**

Following the study, the researchers obtained the Arkansas Reading Benchmark Exam scores of participants for the current school year and the previous school year. The Arkansas Reading Benchmark Exam was chosen to determine impact of the intervention year to year. (In the current school year students took the standardized exam after participating in the study described here.)

## Data Analysis

After the quantitative and qualitative data were collected, the researchers used a triangulation technique to analyze the data to address the research questions previously stated. The researchers analyzed the quantitative data to determine whether a relationship was evident between the use of audiobooks and participation in an audiobook club, and struggling readers' reading ability and attitudes towards reading. Concurrently, the researchers conducted a qualitative analysis to specifically examine how and why the use of audiobooks and participation in an audiobook club affected struggling readers' reading ability and attitudes toward reading. The researchers identified data segments that arose from participant interviews and analyzed the data segments to construct themes that guided the researchers to qualitatively analyze the pre- and post-study interview data. This enabled the researchers to compare and contrast pre- and post-study interview data to determine that significant changes occurred amongst participants reading comprehension and confidence as a result of exposure to audiobooks. The researchers believed that quantitative and qualitative analyses were equally important to comprehensively examine the phenomena associated with the research questions.

## Limitations to the Study

A number of limitations were associated with this study. The researchers lost several participants who relocated to other schools or elected to withdraw before the completion of the study. The researchers were forced to eliminate participants who failed to participate in the pre- and post-participation interviews, or did not have pre- or post-participation Arkansas Reading Benchmark Exam scores in their educational files. As a result, the sample was smaller than the researchers initially anticipated, a circumstance that may lead to limited generalizability of the study results.

Another potential limitation of this study was the potential maturation of the participants. The

researchers did not specifically account for maturation in the original research design; therefore, it is possible that some gains in the struggling readers' reading ability and attitudes were associated with maturation rather than the introduction of audiobooks into the educational setting.

# Findings

## Standardized Test Scores

Research question one asked: Do the use of audiobooks and participation in an audiobook club impact the reading ability of struggling readers? A paired-samples *t*-test was completed to evaluate whether, after participating in the study, participants' Arkansas Benchmark Reading Exam scores were better than the year before. The researchers did discover differences in the ranking of participants' reading performance (see table 7).

Table 7. Change in participants' Arkansas Reading Benchmark Exam reading categories.

| | Participants | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Category | Previous Year | Current Year | Net Difference |
| Below Basic | 2 | 1 | –1 |
| Basic | 11 | 7 | –4 |
| Proficient | 6 | 10 | +4 |
| Advanced | 0 | 1 | +1 |

The results indicated that participants' Arkansas Benchmark Reading Exam scores from the previous year ($M = 468.89$, $SD = 105.98$) were significantly lower than participants' current year Arkansas Benchmark Reading scores ($M = 589.95$, $SD = 111.36$), $t(18) = –6.59$, $p < .00$. The standard effect size index, $\eta^2$, was .171. The 95 percent confidence interval for the mean difference between the two responses was –159.63 to –82.47.

The number of students scoring "Below Basic" and "Basic" decreased, while students scoring "Proficient" and "Advanced" increased. The researchers specifically observed that in the previous year thirteen participants had been identified as "Below Basic" and "Basic" on the Arkansas Reading Benchmark Exam. In contrast, after listening to audiobooks and participating in the library's audiobook club, only eight participants were identified as "Below Basic" or "Basic" on the current school year's Arkansas Reading Benchmark Exam.

While the change might have been due to the audiobooks, it was also possible that maturation played a role in the reduction of participants in the "Below Basic" and "Basic" categories. Further research is needed to identify whether the use of audiobooks can definitely assist in increasing reading scores on standardized tests such as the Arkansas Reading Benchmark Exam.

## Pre-Study and Post-Participation Survey Findings

Research question two asked: Do the use of audiobooks and participation in an audiobook club affect struggling readers' attitudes toward reading? In an effort to answer this question, researchers examined participants' responses to the questions on the quantitative reading-interest survey administered during the pre-study and post-participation interviews with participants. The means from these pre-study and post-participation surveys are reported in table 6. Paired-samples *t*-tests were conducted to evaluate whether there were differences in participants' responses on the pre-study and post-participation survey (see table 6), and the specific analyses are discussed below.

Table 6. Means of responses to pre-study and post-participation quantitative surveys.

| Item | Participants | |
|---|---|---|
| | Pre-Study Interview ($N = 21$) *M* | Post-Participation Interview ($N = 21$) *M* |
| 1. I have access to many types of reading materials. | –1.48 | 1.29* |
| 2. Reading helps me think for myself. | .43 | .71 |
| 3. Reading makes me feel good about myself. | .81 | 1.19 |
| 4. I hope to be a reader my entire life. | .62 | .86 |
| 5. Reading helps me identify with people who are different than me. | .38 | .90* |
| 6. Adults in my school help me select reading materials. | .38 | .86 |
| 7. Adults in my school like to read. | 1.10 | 1.43 |
| 8. Adults in my school can help me improve my reading ability. | 1.43 | 1.29 |
| 9. I always have a choice in what I read. | 1.00 | 1.48* |
| 10. Reading is very important to me. | 1.00 | 1.38 |

*Significant pre/post differences at .05 level.

A paired-samples *t*-test was conducted to evaluate whether participants' responses to Item 1 ("I have access to many types of reading materials.") differed at the beginning and end of the study; the *t*-test results indicated that the mean pre-study response ($M = –1.48$, $SD = .68$) was significantly less than the mean post-participation response ($M = 1.29$, $SD = .78$), $t(20) = –10.73$, $p < .01$. The standard effect size index, $\eta^2$, was .85. The 95 percent confidence interval for the mean difference between the two responses was –3.30 to –2.23.

A paired-samples *t*-test was conducted to evaluate whether participants' responses to Item 5 ("Reading helps me identify with people who are different than me.") differed at the beginning and end of the study; the *t*-test results indicated that the mean pre-study response (*M* = .38, *SD* = .97) was significantly less than the mean post-participation response (*M* = .90, *SD* = .63), *t*(20) = –2.59, *p* = .02. The standard effect size index, $\eta^2$, was .25. The 95 percent confidence interval for the mean difference between the two responses was –.95 to –.10.

A paired-samples *t*-test was conducted to evaluate whether participants' responses to Item 9 ("I always have a choice in what I read.") were different at the beginning and end of the study; the *t*-test results indicated that the mean pre-study response (*M* = 1.00, *SD* = .95) was significantly less than the mean post-participation response (*M* = 1.48, *SD*= .68), *t*(20) = –2.12, *p* = .05. The standard effect size index, $\eta^2$, was .18. The 95 percent confidence interval for the mean difference between the two responses was –.95 to –.01.

The researchers' examination of the quantitative data associated with the survey and the means listed in table 6 revealed several interesting possibilities. The participants perceived that the use of audiobooks significantly expanded their opportunity to read different types of reading materials, and, perhaps, as a result, this access permitted participants to significantly increase their identification with individuals that differ from themselves. The participants also believed that their choice significantly increased as a result of using audiobooks. Participants stated that the use of audiobooks to read assisted them to think for themselves, increased their self-worth, and enhanced their opinion of reading, but the results indicated non-significant increases between the pre-study survey and the post-participation survey mean values. Perhaps a larger sample size would lead to significant increases as a result of listening to audiobooks and participating in the book club centered around the audiobooks.

# Trends Found in Interviews

## Pre-Study Interview Qualitative Questions

Based on the analysis of the data, it was evident that the participants believed themselves to be poor readers. The researchers asked each participant, "Are you a good reader?" Overwhelmingly, participants stated "No." Responses included:

> "No, I can't read really big books."

> "No, I couldn't even read a chapter book last year with 45 pages without help."

The participants were identified as struggling readers. So, the researchers were not surprised the participants did not self-identify as good readers.

Participants also had a difficult time indicating what "kinds of books they like to read." Many couldn't remember specific titles or even genres. Others focused on what they had currently checked out from the school library, books being read aloud by teachers, or books with companion movies that the participants may have viewed, such as *Harry Potter*. However, the most striking (but not surprising) finding from the analysis of the pre-study interview qualitative questions was the participants' response to "Do you like to read? Why or why not?" The majority indicated that they did not like to read. Responses included:

> "I can't understand the words."

> "I don't like what I have to read."

The researchers, through discussions with the school librarian and teachers, discovered the connection to the books familiar to participants. These data would not have been discovered had the study focused entirely on quantitative methods.

## Post-Participation Qualitative Questions

Analysis of the responses to post-participation qualitative interview questions revealed that, in contrast to their pre-study responses, participants expressed a belief in themselves as "good readers." The question was asked, "Are you a good reader?" and 93 percent said "Yes." Responses included:

> "Yes, I am now."

> "Yes, I can read big books like my classmates."

An overwhelming number of participants self-reported that they were now good readers. This represented a major shift in their attitudes toward their own reading abilities, a shift that the researchers suspect was a direct result of exposure to audiobooks.

Further analysis of responses to the post-participation qualitative interview questions revealed the enjoyment participants had with being involved in the book club. The question was asked, "Would you participate in another audiobook club if it was offered again in the future? Why?" One hundred percent indicated "Yes." Responses included:

> "Its fun because you get to talk about books and recommend books to other people."

> "Because I like reading more now, talking about books, and getting new books."

The researchers found this positive reaction significant due to the reticence participants expressed at the beginning of the study. Initially, the participants were shy and somewhat inhibited while talking with peers about books. The researchers believe that this initial hesitance was a product of past struggles with reading and fear of making mistakes in a peer group.

One hundred percent of participants responded "Yes" when asked, "Would you encourage your friends to join an audiobook club if it was offered in the future? Why?" Participants were excited about sharing their books and thoughts with classmates and friends. They showed a new-found love for reading. Responses included:

> "Because if they have trouble reading, it would help them."

> "If they want to become better readers they could use it.

The researchers were touched by the participants' belief that they had been thrown a "life raft" and by participants' desire to do the same for their friends who struggled with reading.

Finally, participants were asked, "Are you reading more?" Once again, 100 percent indicated "Yes." Responses included:

> "Yes, I read about eleven (books) this year, and I read zero last year."

> "Last year I read tiny books and only about six. This year I've read ten books, bigger books that take longer and are better. I love to read now."

This shift in attitudes mirrors the quantitative findings. Participants were reading more than in prior years. The researchers attribute this partially to the improved reading scores on the Arkansas Reading Benchmark Exam. Stronger readers, do indeed, read more.

## Qualitative Interview Questions for Parents

At the end of the study three questions were sent to parents/guardians (see table 5). The responses revealed that parents were elated by the changes in the participants. The first question asked, "Has listening to audiobooks improved your child's/student's reading skills?" Parental responses included:

> "Yes it has given him confidence in sounding words and learning how to read in a consistent manner. He also now loves to read where before we could not get him to read at all."

> "Yes, my son has developed a much more open attitude about reading. He has often complained that he couldn't find books he enjoyed. Now, he has come to realize that he can find interesting books."

The researchers believe these findings to be significant. The scope of this project did not end in the classroom. Rather, the students' improved attitudes and confidence about reading were evident outside of school. This result should be the goal of all learning initiatives.

"Has audiobook club helped your child/student? If so, can you describe how?" Responses included:

> "Yes. He has a great deal of confidence. His testing skills have improved tremendously. We can't get him enough to read now. He gets very excited about what he reads and very animatedly will tell us all about the book."

> "I believe it has opened his mind to realize that there can be personal satisfaction in reading. It's not all about doing what is required to achieve academic success."

Again, the researchers saw the broad impact of their research project. Not only did the participants achieve academic success, but also made great strides in personal achievement and self-esteem.

"Is your child/student reading more books than they did before audiobook club started? If so, approximately how many?" Responses included:

> "Absolutely! He now exceeds his reading goals. Quite honestly, I am not sure how many books he reads because he is always reading and it seems like they are different ones."

> "It's not that he reads more, necessarily. It's that he chooses to read instead of being told to read to settle down to bed. He has begun to ask for specific book, and/or series of books. The love of reading will take you further than the amount of books you count."

While these responses were requested at the end of the project, the school librarian was privy to many anecdotal conversations throughout the school year and had predicted these results. The project, while directed toward struggling readers, undoubtedly had a positive impact on parent attitudes toward literacy instruction and the school itself.

## Qualitative Interview Questions for Teachers

At the end of the study three questions were sent to participants' classroom teachers (see table 5). Judging by the responses, teachers were excited by the transformation in their students. The following are highlights from teachers' responses:

"I feel that it has given them a boost of self-confidence because they are reading the harder books that their classmates are."

"I have seen them get excited about reading! They love any silent reading time given in class in order to read their audiobooks. They are reading more independently and taking pride in their accomplishments."

"Some of them started 4th grade just reading picture books because many of the other books seemed too hard to them. Now they cannot put down chapter books and love them."

"I have seen one of my students go from having to be told constantly to sit down and get a book out during reading time to asking me if it was reading time yet. This student's behavior has drastically improved due to the audiobook club. They are reading now instead of goofing off!"

"Their improvement would be that they are branching out in the genre of books they read and they CANNOT put books down now! Hurray!"

"Yes! Audiobooks are awesome! They make reading exciting! They allow struggling readers to love reading and feel confident about their reading."

The impact of this project was more far-reaching than the researchers ever anticipated. While the teachers were initially pleased to have some outside help with their struggling readers, most were satisfied to send in a list of students and leave it at that. The teachers' responses, however, indicate that by the end of the study they were sold on the use of audiobooks.

# Conclusions

The primary goal of this study was to answer the research questions 1) Do the use of audiobooks and participation in an audiobook club impact the reading ability of struggling readers? 2) Do the use of audiobooks and participation in an audiobook club impact struggling readers' attitudes toward reading?

The analysis of Arkansas Reading Benchmark Exam scores revealed a significant increase. Additionally, the quantitative analysis, and qualitative feedback from students, parents, and teachers revealed that the use of audiobooks embedded within a book club that was a school library program made a difference in the lives of the student involved in the study. Thus, both research questions led the researchers to proclaim the use of audiobooks with struggling readers a success.

The success of this research project is significant given the broad use of audiobooks in literacy and library programs across the United States. Teachers and school librarians may also use these findings as a rationale for adding audiobooks to the list of reading strategies used successfully with struggling readers.

We are interested in future research on the use of audiobooks with struggling readers who are younger and older than those who participated in the study, and on audiobook usage with English Language Learners.

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# Cite This Article

Whittingham, Jeff; Huffman, Stephanie; Christensen, Rob; and McAllister, Tracy. 2013. "Use of Audiobooks in a School Library and Positive Effects of Struggling Readers' Participation in a Library-Sponsored Audiobook Club." American Association of School Librarians. <**http://www.ala.org/aasl/slr/volume16/whittingham-huffman-christensen-mcallister**>

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