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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

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



The research questions for this study are below.

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?



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



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.

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

The results indicated that participants' Arkansas Reading Benchmark Exam scores were better than the year before.

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 ($t(31) = 4.60, p < .001$) and ($t(31) = 4.80, p < .001$) indicated significant differences between pre-study and post-participation scores on reading interest.

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-

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

“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 read



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