

English Literature | Full Research Article

Assessing the Efficacy of Extensive Reading Via Developing Audiobooks Among Afghan EFL Learners

Shagofah Noor, Herat University

Abstract

This research paper is intended to study the effects of creating audiobooks on developing the reading skills of the Afghan EFL sophomore students of the English Department at Herat University, Afghanistan. Students were provided with an opportunity to create audiobooks for the simplified novel they read in groups. In the end, students reflected on their experience of creating audiobooks by completing a questionnaire. Data obtained from the questionnaire was quantitatively analyzed using descriptive statistics. The findings of the questionnaire were analyzed and sorted into five categories: the level of motivation, the development of reading skills, the level of difficulty, the participants' experience in working in groups, and the language development aspect of the participants while creating audiobooks for extensive reading purposes. The study results suggest that creating audiobooks as a comprehensive reading tool was motivating and beneficial in developing the overall language skills of the Afghan EFL sophomore students.

Keywords: Reading skills; simplified novels; proficiency; motivation; audiobook development

Introduction

Reading is a vital skill for success at the undergraduate level; therefore, language instructors persistently explore methodologies and approaches to help language learners master reading skills. An audiobook is recording a book customarily done on CD, cassette, or digital format (Montgomery, 2009). Audiobooks are also known as 'recorded books.' It is a modern product combining traditional storytelling and cassette technology (Chen, 2004). Audiobooks are also referred to as audio versions of books, literature read aloud and recorded narratives (Casbergue & Harris, 1996). Students have access to smartphones and up-to-date gadgets that create an audiobook much faster and hustle free in modern language classrooms.

Background of the Study

Researchers have attempted to study the effects of creating audiobooks on developing language learners' reading skills. The Have and Birgitte, 2020; James, 2017; Popescu, 2020;

and Whittingham, Huffman, Christensen, and McAllister, 2013 are some of the examples of the studies conducted to study audiobooks concerning the reading skills development.

Ever since the world has turned into a global village, modern gadgets have found their way into language classrooms. According to Have and Pedersen (2020), smartphones, laptops, and tablets have changed the ways language instruction was perceived in the past.

Problem Statement

Afghan EFL students at the English department of Herat University have always struggled with mastering reading skills despite taking four reading comprehension courses. Students are perhaps reluctant to take on the initiative of opting for texts outside the classroom to work on developing the reading skills. Brinda (2011) defines reluctant readers as individuals who have reading skills to read; however, they choose not to do so. Moreover, it can be asserted that a reluctant reader is also a struggling reader. When students are not interested in reading the written texts, it will lead to a lack of desire to explore the texts more in-depth. Thus, negatively affecting the overall development of the reading skills among language learners.

Technology is dominating our lives in ways never imagined before. With the rapid growth of information technology, language classrooms seek ways to integrate technology in language instruction. In reading classrooms, audiobooks have been utilized to motivate more reluctant readers to take on extensive reading projects. According to Popescue (2020), "audiobooks have always been regarded as second-hand reading" (p.5). However, according to Popescue, now it is evident that audiobooks are as effective as reading printed books. Thus, audiobooks can serve as tools to promote reading among language learners and help them develop their reading skills. Therefore, the current study is intended to fill the gap and add to the existing body of the literature by conducting an experimental research study to examine the effect of developing audiobooks on reading skills among Afghan EFL students.

Research Objective

To provide students with an opportunity to work on the reading skills, the researcher opted for creating audiobooks for simplified novels by the EFL (English as Foreign Language) learners at the English Department of Herat University. Extensive reading was approached via reading the simplified novels students themselves chose for their group. The text selection and the selection of the genre for the novel were left on the students' preference; however, the level of the simplified novel was pre-decided by the researcher. This research paper explores the effects of creating audiobooks on developing the reading skills of language learners. The effects of audiobooks on reading development have been studied before; however, there were no studies exploring the potential impact of developing audiobooks on the improvement of reading skills. The researcher was interested in looking at the benefits gained through extensive reading via creating audiobooks in Afghan EFL students.

Research Questions

This research study explores the following research question:

1. How does creating an audiobook affect sophomore students' reading skills development at the English Department?
2. To what extent creating audiobooks motivate Afghan EFL learners to read extensively?

Literature Review

Audiobooks have been traditionally used for disabled children or with students that struggled with reading skills (Johnson, 2003); however, a lot has changed over the years. Audiobooks are considered to be a viable source for language learners. Audiobooks have been around for decades; however, their true potential in teaching language skills was only realized in recent years. According to Cahill and Moore (2017), the ever first example of an audio production of written text which was attempted by Thomas Edison dates back to 1877. Ever since, there have been constant efforts in creating an audiobook, but because of technological limitations, audiobooks' production was often laid off. Moreover, at the beginning of the twentieth century, books were read on the radio to attract a wider audience (Cahill & Moore, 2017). Thus, the audiobooks' production started and flourished as the demand for audiobooks increased among the masses.

The increased popularity of audiobooks has opened a new venue in language instruction. It has been utilized in teaching listening skills widely; however, other skills such as reading have also benefited from audiobooks' positive effects in language learning. The vast number of audiobooks available provides language learners to garner from the resources. For years, there has been a debate whether audiobooks can serve as reading material or not; nevertheless, it has recently established itself as a viable source for reading classrooms.

Using Audiobooks for Extensive Reading Purposes

Audiobook, also called 'books on tape,' is the other version of fiction or nonfiction books that are audio-taped professionally in full-length or uncut (Holum & Gahala, 2001). Audiobooks were first introduced during the 1930s by the American government for blind people (Mohamed, 2018). It started with cassette tapes and then CDs, but with the emergence of the internet and downloadable audiobooks, they became prevalent so fast. Audiobooks have been successfully used in L2 language learning with young learners (Larson, 2015), adolescent readers (Wolfson, 2008), and adult readers (Rogowsky, et al., 2016).

Imawan (2019) believes that using audiobooks in learning and teaching, especially in language classes such as English, focuses on improving students' reading skills as the learners need to have something to read and engage in the process of decoding the text. Audiobooks help students read and develop their critical reading skills. Based on research, using audiobooks in the classroom for EFL learning and teaching can have positive results in a significant improvement in students' reading comprehension skills.

One of the reasons that make reading a challenging skill for EFL students is the lack of practice; students read less outside of the classroom, they only read a few lines in class (Imawan, 2019). Many scholars have argued that students with this situation can be aided with implementing audiobooks in the class or assigned to them to use out of the classroom. The challenges of acquiring information, decoding words (phrases and sentences or paragraphs), recalling some details provided in text, understanding sequence or the order in which the ideas are presented, making predictions based on the information in text, drawing conclusions about the goal of the text, making inferences about what might not be present in text, and retelling the information of the book are hard for some of the students who can be eased by using a supporting media like audiobook (Grover & Hannegan, 2012).

According to Rogowsky, et al, (2016), audiobooks can motivate failing and disinterested readers who find reading a problematic skill in learning the target language. To be successful in a reading class, students must make more organized and determined efforts. Unfortunately, the reason would be that there is not enough allocated class time to develop students' reading skills in class, especially in large classes and when the teacher has no time to check every student's understanding of the text (Wolfson, 2008). Therefore, students who find reading a problematic skill or have trouble understanding foreign texts need more reading practices outside the classroom to gain appropriate reading or be more exposed to reading materials. To overcome this issue, the audiobook can carry out the requirement to do the job for both the teacher and students, in which students can read independently whenever they want (Imawan, 2019).

Benefits of Developing Audiobooks for Language Learning

According to Padberg-Schmitt (2020), by making students aware of what to look at when reading, they will comprehend what they are doing during the reading process. She further adds that if this condition is facilitated by an audio input for the learners, they will feel more comfortable if they face new structures or new words in the comprehension process.

Isozaki (2018) overviewed the most related research and mentioned the vitality of enjoying the reading process. She claims that by reading to the student, the joy of storytelling creates a sense of motivation among learners, and the zone of proximal literacy development is activated. Research on the use of audiobooks with language learners resulted in a lot of positive effects, such as improving listening comprehension (Kartal & Simsek, 2017), vocabulary acquisition (Chang, 2011), improving reading comprehension and fluency (Chang & Millet, 2015), introducing literature using audiobooks (Isozaki, 2014), increasing reading efficiency and motivation in the reading process (Woodall, 2010).

Audiobooks can ease teachers' role in reading activity at the class that teachers can let audiobook do the reading-for-students instead of just teacher talking. It would be beneficial for non-native foreign language teachers specifically (Grover & Hannegan, 2012). Using audiobooks in reading activities at a language class will enable students to acquire foreign language speaking skills. Ayunda (2015) found that EFL students who were exposed to the audiobook during a reading activity at the class turn out to be more fluent and use more varied vocabularies than non-exposed students in the foreign language conversation. She found this through an experimental research to help students understand the story from a book by instructing students to listen to the audiobook after reading a passage of the book. She also found out that those students could correctly imitate the same grammatical structures in their reading and speaking.

Efficacy of Audiobook in Developing Reading Skills

Chang & Millet (2015), Isozaki (2014), Kartal and Simsek (2017), and Mohamed (2018), in their studies, have concluded that integrating auditory input improves various skills (specifically vocabulary acquisition, reading, and listening comprehension) as well as a significant increase in motivation among the learners. Padberg-Schmitt (2020), in a case study, found out that through the use of auditory input in the form of audiobooks, reading fluency and the joy of reading could be developed in a reader who is slow or has difficulties in understanding the text.

Larson's (2015) study shows that EFL learners feel more excited in reading while reading e-books accompanied by audiobooks, their literacy skills also enhance, and their language learning has improved. Those advantages are essential for foreign language learners to improve their reading skills, reading comprehension, and language learning. Thus, since the audiobook can give enjoyment in reading and improve the quality of reading at the same time, language learners, especially EFL students, can use it in their daily reading activity, more importantly, they can do it independently without the existence of their teachers to monitor them. This can lead to more exposure of the students to the foreign language since it makes them more accustomed to the target language in terms of vocabulary and sentence structure. Given a considerable number of studies attempted to explore the benefits of audiobooks, this study set out to contribute to the existing body of literature by assessing the efficacy of extensive reading via developing audiobooks. It is an attempt to investigate the impact of the development of the audiobooks on the reading skills of the language learners.

Research Method

This research paper intends to study the effects of creating audiobooks on developing sophomore students' reading skills such as inferences, story flow, skimming, getting main idea, guessing the meaning of the words from context. The researcher employed a quantitative research design for the study. In a quantitative research design, according to Harrison (2010), data is analyzed objectively; moreover, results of the study are analyzed based on the possibility of their "generalizability to the population as a whole" (p. 130). Therefore, the researcher opted for a quantitative research design to investigate the efficacy of extensive reading via creating audiobooks on Afghan EFL learners' reading skills.

Participants

The participants of the study were selected from the sophomore students of the English Department of Herat University. Purposive sampling was used to collect data from the participants of the study. There were 47 female and 25 male students who completed a questionnaire to reflect on their experience of creating an audiobook. A demographic survey was conducted to collect data about the participants of the study; Table 1 provides details of the findings of the demographic information.

Table 1.

Demographics of the Respondents

| Categories | Responses | |
|----------------------------------------|------------------|-----------|
| Gender | Male=25 | Female=47 |
| Language Background | Persian (Dari) | |
| Age | Between 18-23 | |
| Years of studying the English language | Minimum 11 years | |

Instrument

Data was collected through a questionnaire which was adapted from James (2017). A questionnaire is one of the most extensively used instruments for data collection. There were 20 items in the close-ended questionnaire; the range of options is 'strongly disagree' (1) to 'strongly agree' (5). The questionnaire items were designed to determine the level of motivation, difficulty level, and the positive impacts of creating an audiobook on the students' language development.

To find out the reliability of the instruments, the researcher piloted the questionnaire with 15 sophomore students of the English Department from the evening shift before it was distributed to the participants of the study. Cronbach alpha value was used to determine the instrument's reliability; the Cronbach alpha value for the questionnaire in the piloting stage was $\alpha=.82$, which suggests that the questionnaire's statements were internally consistent and the questionnaire was reliable. Thus, it was ready to be distributed to the participants of the study.

Table 2
Cronbach Alpha Value of the Questionnaire

| Cronbach's alpha | Internal Consistency |
|-------------------------|----------------------|
| $\alpha \geq 0.9$ | Excellent |
| $0.9 > \alpha \geq 0.8$ | Good |
| $0.8 > \alpha \geq 0.7$ | Acceptable |
| $0.7 > \alpha \geq 0.6$ | Questionable |
| $0.6 > \alpha \geq 0.5$ | Poor |
| $0.5 > \alpha$ | Unacceptable |

Procedure

Participants of the study were asked to form groups and create an audiobook collaboratively. They were given a choice to pick a simplified novel for this project; however, the level of the novel was set to be between upper-intermediate to advance. Each student had to read and record 15 pages from the novel, observing a suitable tone for the situation they were reading; hence, students formed groups of 4 to 5 members depending on the mentioned criteria. It was outlined in the description of the project that students were not just reading the text; they were serving as the narrator of the story; therefore, they had to understand the storyline, feel the emotions, and convey the concept of the story through their tone, pitch, and style. As the narrator of the story; therefore, students need to fully comprehend the story to tell the story observing the emotions intended by the author. As a narrator, students were "not just a voice. The narrator has to get inside the words and thus into the author's head (Jacobi, 2014). In the end, the group leaders collected the recordings students created on their smartphones and, as a file, submitted the audiobook to the researcher.

Data Analysis

Data obtained from the questionnaire was quantitatively analyzed. Descriptive statistics for the obtained data were analyzed. The researcher opted for SPSS software to analyze the mean, median, standard deviation, and mode to find the effects of creating audiobooks on

the students' language development and to what extent making audiobooks motivate the learners to read extensively. The results are explained in the following section.

Results

This quantitative study was aimed to investigate the efficacy of extensive reading via developing audiobooks among Afghan EFL learners. Participants of the study completed a questionnaire to record their responses regarding extensive reading efficacy in developing their reading comprehension using audiobooks as a tool. The following is an analysis of the questionnaire, divided into five categories, i.e., to assess the level of motivation, the development of reading skills, the level of difficulty, their experience in working in groups, and the language development aspect of the audiobook development process.

Table 3 shows that participants of the study recorded their experience developing their audiobooks in collaboration with their friends. The questionnaire items included 'I like creating audiobooks with my friends,' 'creating audiobooks in groups was easy,' and 'creating audiobooks individually by the participants would have been a difficult and tiresome task.'

Table 3

Participants Experiences in Developing Audiobooks in Groups

| | I like creating audiobooks with my friends | Creating audiobooks in groups was easy | Creating audiobook individually would have been difficult and tiresome task |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Mean | 4.11 | 3.34 | 4.03 |
| Std. Deviation | .433 | 1.03 | .91 |
| Minimum | 3 | 1 | 2 |
| Maximum | 5 | 5 | 5 |
| N | 72 | 72 | 72 |

The statistics for participants' experience in developing audiobooks in groups indicate that for item 'I like creating audiobooks with my friends' the mean value was M=4.11 with the standard of .433, the minimum score was Min=3, while the maximum score was Max=5. For item 'creating audiobooks in groups was easy', the mean value was M=3.34 with the standard deviation of 1.03, the minimum score was Min=1, while the maximum score was Max=5. Moreover, for item 'creating audiobook individually would have been difficult and tiresome task,' the mean value was M=4.03 with the standard deviation of .91. The minimum value recorded for the item was Min=2, while the maximum score was Max=5. Thus, the results indicate that participants of the study had a positive experience in developing audiobooks.

The questionnaire results further provide insight into the experience of language learners regarding the development of the participants' reading skills. They indicated that they had

realized a development in their word recognition ability, reading fluency, inferencing, and prediction skills. The efficacy of extensive reading on developing reading skills is analyzed in Table 4.2.

Table 4.

The Development of Reading Skills via creating an audiobook for Extensive Reading Purposes

| | My word recognition abilities have improved | I can infer unstated information from the text | I can predict what will happen next in the story | I can read more fluently now |
|-----------------------|----------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Mean | 4.45 | 4.09 | 4.35 | 4.23 |
| Std. Deviation | .85 | 1.01 | .81 | .79 |
| Minimum | 1 | 2 | 2 | 3 |
| Maximum | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 |
| N | 72 | 72 | 72 | 72 |

The statistics for the development of reading skills via creating an audiobook for extensive reading purposes indicate that for item 'my word recognition abilities have improved', the mean value was M=4.45 with the standard deviation of .85 score was Min=1, while the maximum score was Max=5. For item 'I can infer unstated information from the text', the mean value was M=4.09 with the standard deviation of 1.01, the minimum score was Min=2, while the maximum score was Max=5. Moreover, for item 'I can predict what will happen next in the story,' the mean value was M=4.35 with a standard deviation of .81. The minimum value recorded for the item was Min=2, while the maximum score was Max=5. The item 'I can read more fluently now' had the mean value of M=4.23 with the standard deviation of .79 and minimum value of Min=3, and maximum value of Max=5. Thus, the results indicate that creating an audiobook for extensive reading purposes developed the reading skills of the participants of the study.

In the following Table (5), the language development aspect of the audiobook development process is analyzed. The items 'I learned new words,' 'I learned new structures,' and 'creating audiobooks improved my overall language skills.' are presented in this table.

Table 5

Participants' Language Development Process via Creating Audiobooks

| I learned new words | I learned new structures | Creating audiobooks improved my overall language skills |
|----------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|
|----------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|

| | | | |
|-----------------------|------|------|------|
| Mean | 4.03 | 4.06 | 4.18 |
| Std. Deviation | .92 | .86 | .85 |
| Minimum | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| Maximum | 5 | 5 | 5 |
| N | 72 | 72 | 72 |

The results for participants' language development process via creating audiobooks indicate that for item 'I learned a new word,' the mean value was M=4.03 with the standard of .92, the minimum score was Min=2, while the maximum score was Max=5. For item 'I learned new structures,' the mean value was M=4.06 with the standard deviation of .86, the minimum score was Min=2, while the maximum score was Max=5. Moreover, for the item 'creating audiobooks improved my overall language skills', the mean value was M=4.18 with a standard deviation of .85. The minimum value recorded for the item was Min=2, while the maximum score was Max=5. Therefore, the results indicate that participants benefited from creating audiobooks to expand their vocabulary and grammar knowledge and develop their language skills.

In Table 6, the level of motivation of participants is presented in reading extensively while creating audiobooks. The items 'I want to create more audiobooks in future,' 'creating audiobooks makes me want to read more,' and 'creating an audiobook is rewarding and fun.'

Table 6
Participants Level of Motivation in Developing Audiobooks

| | I want to create more audiobooks in future | Creating audiobooks makes me want to read more | Creating audiobook is rewarding and fun |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| Mean | 4.23 | 4.1 | 4.14 |
| Std. Deviation | .88 | .72 | .177 |
| Minimum | 2 | 3 | 1 |
| Maximum | 5 | 5 | 5 |
| N | 72 | 72 | 72 |

The participants' level of motivation in creating audiobooks indicates that for item 'I want to create more audiobooks in future,' the mean value was M=4.23 with the standard of .88, the minimum score was Min=2, while the maximum score was Max=5. For item 'creating audiobooks make me want to read more', the mean value was M=4.1 with the standard deviation of .72, the minimum score was Min=3 while the maximum score was Max=5. Moreover, for the item 'creating an audiobook is rewarding and fun', the mean value was M=4.14 with a standard deviation of .177. The minimum value recorded for the item was

Min=1, while the maximum score was Max=5. Hence, the results indicate that students were highly motivated to read extensively while creating audiobooks as the mean score for all three items in the category is above 4.

The level to which creating audiobooks were challenging for the study participants is analyzed in Table 7. The items 'Changing tone was difficult while creating an audiobook,' 'changing pitch was difficult while creating an audiobook,' 'problems with pronouncing new words interrupted the reading process,' and 'creating audiobooks were challenging.' {these sentences are not complete in most cases. I tried to complete in the above sections but it would be great if the writer writes what he/she intended to.

Table 7
The Challenges Participants Faced in Creating Audiobooks

| | Changing tone was difficult while creating an audiobook | Changing pitch was difficult while creating an audiobook | Problems with pronouncing new words interrupted reading process | Creating audiobooks were challenging |
|----------------|---------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Mean | 3.72 | 4.1 | 4.39 | 3.97 |
| Std. Deviation | 1.11 | .72 | .621 | .92 |
| Minimum | 1 | 2 | 3 | 2 |
| Maximum | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 |
| N | 72 | 72 | 72 | 72 |

The for challenges in creating audiobooks indicate that for item 'changing tone was difficult while creating an audiobook' the mean value was M=3.72 with the standard of 1.11, the minimum score was Min=1, while the maximum score was Max=5. For item 'changing pitch was difficult while creating an audiobook', the mean value was M=4.1 with the standard deviation of .72, the minimum score was Min=2, while the maximum score was Max=5. Moreover, for item 'problems with pronouncing new words interrupted reading process', the mean value was M=4.39 with the standard deviation of .621. The minimum value recorded for the item was Min=3, while the maximum score was Max=5. Furthermore, the statistics for the item 'creating audiobooks were challenging' the mean score was M=3.97 with the standard deviation of .92 and the minimum score of Min=2, and the maximum score of Max=5. Hence, the results indicate that the study participants had problems changing their tone and pitch while reading; however, the most challenging part was when they faced new words in the text. The results of the study demonstrate that creating audiobooks was not very easy.

The data obtained from the questionnaire were categorized into four sections, the 'participants experience in developing audiobooks in groups,' 'participants' language development process via creating audiobooks,' 'participants level of motivation in

developing audiobooks,' and 'the challenges participants faced in creating audiobooks.' The discussion of the given categories is presented in the following section.

Discussion

The participants of the study demonstrated positive attitude towards creating audiobooks. They were also highly motivated to complete the project; moreover, participants indicated that their reading skills and overall language skills have improved due to creating an audiobook for extensive reading purposes. However, they also mentioned that they faced some challenges in completing the project.

Participants of the study were asked to work in groups to create their audiobooks. As the study results show, their experience of working in groups helped them have a positive attitude towards the project. According to McDonough (2004), when EFL students collaborate in completing group activities, their overall language proficiency improves, and they have a positive attitude towards the target language use. Besides, Wang (2021) found out that when learners collaboratively complete an assignment, it fosters a positive interdependence and language and emotional development in the language learners. Therefore, participants of the current study demonstrated a positive attitude towards working in groups in completing the project, but they also indicated that they enjoyed the group activity.

Creating audiobooks improved the reading skills of the participants. As shown in Table 4, the average mean value for this category is relatively high, which indicates that participants of the study found the project to help develop the inferencing, prediction skills, word recognition abilities, and, overall, reading fluency the participants of the study. In a recent study, Tusmagambet (2020) found that audiobooks develop language learners' reading fluency and enhance reading comprehension, reading speed, and reading motivation. Young-Soon (2018) also claim that audiobooks develop the reading fluency of EFL learners. Hence, it can be drawn from the findings of the current study that audiobooks are beneficial in developing the reading skills of language learners, which suggests that the results of this study are aligned with those of Young-Soon (2018).

Moreover, the inferencing and prediction skills of participants also developed due to creating audiobooks. In a study by Wolfson (2008), it was claimed that audiobook develops language learners' inferencing skills; it also improves their critical skills, prediction skills, ability to conclude, and their ability to understand the story's sequence. Therefore, creating audiobooks fosters the language learners' reading skills and helps them develop critical reading skills, as indicated in this study.

When reading extensively, the study participants indicated that they noticed a positive growth in their vocabulary knowledge, their structure (grammar) knowledge, and, overall, language skills. They indicated that their vocabulary storage has expanded as the mean value for their responses ($M=4.03$) suggests an agreement among the participants' responses to create audiobooks for extensive reading. Chang (2011) claims that the use of audiobooks helps in acquiring new vocabulary. According to him, audiobooks serve as a rich source for vocabulary expansion, but language learners can also learn new grammatical structures and improve their writing skills. Thus, when creating and using audiobooks, language learners

can expand their vocabulary store, learn patterns and grammatical structures they have not noticed before, and simultaneously work on enhancing their writing skills as well.

The participants of the study showed a high level of motivation in reading and recording their audiobooks. They indicated that they enjoyed the process of creating audiobooks; they also indicated that they are willing to continue such activities and keep working on creating more audiobooks in the future. According to Tusmagambet (2020), audiobooks motivate language learners to work on their language skills. According to him, audiobooks help develop reading skills and keep the learner engaged and motivated throughout the process. Hence, when creating audiobooks, it is important to provide readers with a choice of genre, provide them plenty of time to read at their own pace, and keep them engaged and motivated.

The study participants were asked to tell the story observing the tone, style, and emotions the author intended. As a narrator, they were not just a voice; they had to project the thoughts of the narrator. Thus, when creating the audiobook, the study participants had to bring variation in the tone, pitch, and style of delivery of the characters' emotions. Most of the participants of the study found it challenging to change their tone, style, and pitch of their voice to fit the characters of the story as the mean values for the statement 'changing tone was difficult when creating an audiobook' was $M=3.72$, and the mean value for the statement 'changing pitch was difficult when creating an audiobook' was $M=4.1$. These mean values suggest that participants struggled in keeping up with the tone and pitch to deliver the emotions of the characters in the story.

Moreover, it was also found that while recording the audiobook, when participants stumbled over a new word, their reading speed dropped, they had to start over again, and they missed the comprehension of the section. When they were interrupted by a new word in the text, often they would stop, check for the pronunciation and meaning, and then started over again. This process urged the readers to read the exact text repeatedly to understand the storyline fully. According to Ledger and Merga (2018), when language learners read aloud, they are more conscious, and when a new word is encountered in the text, their reading process is interrupted, which also hinders the reading comprehension.

Conclusion

This study investigates the efficacy of extensive reading by making the study participants develop audiobooks and assess language learners' development of reading proficiency. The study results indicate that creating audiobooks positively affected the language development of Afghan EFL learners. It was found that creating audiobooks helped in developing reading skills and, overall, their language skills. The findings of the study also indicated that despite challenges in creating audiobooks, participants were motivated to create more audiobooks in the future. Overall, the results of this study suggest that creating audiobooks as a comprehensive reading tool was motivating the learners and beneficial in developing the overall language skills of the Afghan EFL university students.

Pedagogical Implication

There are several pedagogical implications of the current study for language teachers. First, creating audiobooks to help develop EFL learners' reading skills has not been widely

investigated; thus, it has also not significantly been utilized in language learning contexts. Therefore, for extensive reading purposes, teachers can include creating audiobooks in their syllabi to enhance their students' reading language skills. Second, since creating audiobooks would require the students to use technology, it will attract young learners and keep them engaged in completing the activity. On the other hand, the recording can be done on any mobile phone; therefore, it can be implemented with minimal available resources. Third, creating audiobooks will promote autonomy since creating audiobooks does not require constant supervision and guidance of the language teacher; therefore, language learners can initiate working on the activity wherever they can and whenever they choose to work on it. Finally, when working on audiobooks in groups, learners can provide feedback, learn from each other, and collectively improve their language skills.

Funding

The author received no direct funding for this research.

About the Author

Shagofah Noor completed her degree in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) from Northern Arizona University in 2018 through Fulbright scholarship. She has been teaching English major undergraduates at Herat University, Afghanistan, for last eight years. She has carried out multiple research projects, most of which were published locally. She is interested in exploring reading and speaking skills, and she is inclined towards studying pragmatics as well. Therefore, the current research project is aligned with the previous research projects.

References

- Ayunda, A. N. (2015). The effects of audiobook use on EFL students' fluency development. *Journal on English as a Foreign Language, 3*(2), 85-92.
- Brinda, W. (2011). A "ladder to literacy" engages reluctant readers: Students help create a new approach to reading and enjoying literature assigned in school. *Middle School Journal, 43*(2), 8-17.
- Cahill, M., & Moore, J. (2017). A sound history: Audiobooks are music to children's ears. *Children and libraries, 15*(1), 22-29.
- Casbergue, R. M., & Harris, K. (1996). Listening and literacy: Audiobooks in the reading program. *Reading Horizons: A Journal of Literacy and Language Arts, 37*(1), 4.
- Chang, A. C. S. (2011). The Effect of Reading While Listening to Audiobooks: Listening Fluency and Vocabulary Gain. *Asian Journal of English Language Teaching, 21*.
- Chang, A. C-S. & Millett, S. (2017). Narrow reading: Effects on EFL learners' reading speed, comprehension, and perceptions. *Reading in a Foreign Language, 29* (1), 1-19.
- Chen, S. H. L. (2004). Improving Reading Skills through Audiobooks. *School Library Media Activities Monthly, 21*(1), 22-25.

- Grover, S., & Hannegan, L. D. (2012). Listening to learn: Audiobooks supporting literacy. Chicago: American Library Association. Retrieved from ProQuest Ebook Central.
- Have, I., & Pedersen, B. S. (2020). Reading Audiobooks. In *Beyond Media Borders, Volume 1* (pp. 197-216). Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.
- Harrison, L. (2010). Quantitative designs and statistical analysis. *Doing early childhood research: International perspectives on theory and practice*, 127-154.
- Holum, A., & Gahala, J. (2001). Critical issue: Using technology to enhance literacy instruction. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED480229>.
- Imawan, R. M. (2019). Audiobooks for Assisting EFL Students in Reading Independently. *JELTL (Journal of English Language Teaching and Linguistics)*, Vol 4 (1)
- Isozaki, A. H. (2018). Strategically Building Reading Fluency: Three Strands of New Listening Reading Research. *Extensive Reading World Congress Proceedings*, 4, 189-197. Retrieved from: <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/e625/091d8f45d7d9c71148a70d8686da9ada4377.pdf>
- James, C. C. (2017). Engaging reluctant readers through audiobook project. *International Journal on E-Learning Practices (IJELP)*.
- Johnson, D. (2003). Benefits of audio books for all readers. *Reading rockets*.
- Kartal, G. & Simsek, H. (2017). The effects of audiobooks on ESL students' listening comprehension. *The Reading Matrix: An International Online Journal*, 17 (1), 112-123. Retrieved from: <http://www.readingmatrix.com/files/16-7w4b733r.pdf>
- Larson, L.C. (2015). E-Books and audiobooks: Extending the digital experience. *The Reading Teacher*, 69 (2), 169-177.
- Ledger, S., & Merga, M. K. (2018). Reading aloud: Children's attitudes toward being read to at home and at school. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 43(3), 124-139.
- McDonough, K. (2004). Learner-learner interaction during pair and small group activities in a Thai EFL context. *System*, 32(2), 207-224.
- Mohamed, M.M.K. (2018). Using audiobooks for developing listening comprehension among Saudi EFL preparatory year students. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 9 (1), 64- 73. Doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17507/jltr.0901.08>
- Montgomery, J. R. (2009). Using Audio Books to Improve Reading and Academic Performance. *Online Submission*.
- Padberg-Schmitt, B. (2020), Increasing Reading Fluency in Young Adult Readers Using Audiobooks. *CLELE journal*, Vol 8, 1, 31- 51.
- Popescu, C. (2020). The Benefits of Audiobooks for ESL Students.
- Rogowsky, B.A., Calhoun, B.M. & Tallal, P. (2016). Does modality matter? The effects of reading, listening, and dual modality on comprehension. *SAGE Open*, 1-9.
- So Young-soon. (2018). *Effects of Audiobooks on Kazakhstani EFL Learners' Reading Development: Focusing on Fluency and Motivation* (Doctoral dissertation, Seoul National University Graduate School).
- Tusmagambet, B. (2020). Effects of Audiobooks on EFL Learners' Reading Development: Focus on Fluency and Motivation. *English Teaching*, 75(2), 41-67.
- Wang, J. (2021). Friendship Group Activities: Voices from Chinese EFL Learners. *English Language Teaching*, 14(1), 140-151.

- Whittingham, J., Huffman, S., Christensen, R., & McAllister, T. (2013). Use of Audiobooks in a School Library and Positive Effects of Struggling Readers' Participation in a Library-Sponsored Audiobook Club. *School Library Research*, 16.
- Woodall, B. (2010). Simultaneous listening and reading in ESL: Helping second language learners read (and enjoy reading) more efficiently. *TESOL journal*, 1(2), 186-205.
- Wolfson, G. (2008). Using audiobooks to meet the needs of adolescent readers. *American Secondary Education*, 36 (2), 105-114.

Appendix

Questionnaire

Dear Sophomore students,

You are invited to participate in this survey. The survey is specifically designed for sophomore students of the English Department at Herat University. The survey is part of a research project on 'Assessing the efficacy of extensive reading via developing audiobooks among Afghan EFL learners.' It will take approximately 10 minutes to complete the questionnaire. Your survey responses will be strictly confidential, and data from this research will be reported only in the aggregate. Your information will be coded and will remain confidential.

Thank you in advance for participating in this research survey.

| NO. | Statements | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|-----|----------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|----------|---------|-------|----------------|
| 1. | I like creating audiobooks with my friends. | | | | | |
| 2. | Creating audiobooks with my friends is easy. | | | | | |
| 3. | The audiobook project makes reading fun. | | | | | |
| 4. | I would rather work individually on creating an audiobook. | | | | | |
| 5. | Creating audiobook is rewarding and fun. | | | | | |
| 6. | The audiobook project makes me want to read more books. | | | | | |
| 7. | I want to create more audiobooks in future. | | | | | |
| 8. | My reading improved as I was working on creating an audiobook. | | | | | |
| 9. | My vocabulary improved as a result of working on this project. | | | | | |

| | | | | | | |
|-----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|--|--|--|--|
| 10. | I learned new words as I was reading extensively while creating an audiobook. | | | | | |
| 11. | I learned new structures as a result of reading extensively while creating an audiobook. | | | | | |
| 12. | Creating audiobooks improved my language skills. | | | | | |
| 13. | Changing tone was difficult while creating an audiobook. | | | | | |
| 14. | Changing pitch was difficult while creating an audiobook. | | | | | |
| 15. | Problems with pronouncing new words interrupted reading fluency. | | | | | |
| 16. | Creating audiobooks was challenging. | | | | | |
| 17. | My word recognition abilities improved as a result of creating audiobooks for Extensive Reading purposes. | | | | | |
| 18. | I can infer unstated information from the text. | | | | | |
| 19. | I can predict what will happen next in the story. | | | | | |
| 20. | I can read more fluently now. | | | | | |