



## Audiobooks to Enhance Students' Reading Comprehension: A Classroom Action Research in A Remote Senior High School

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.18415/ijmmu.v12i9.6994>

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### **Abstract**

Reading comprehension is a crucial skill for academic success, yet many students in remote areas struggle with this competency due to limited resources, traditional teaching methods, and low motivation. This classroom action research was conducted to investigate the integration of audiobooks as a pedagogical tool to enhance students' reading comprehension at a remote senior high school in Indonesia. The study aimed to describe the implementation process, examine its impact on the students' comprehension, explore the challenges encountered, and analyze students' responses. The Classroom Action Research (CAR) was designed based on the model of Kemmis and McTaggart (1988), consisting of three iterative cycles: planning, action, observation, and reflection. The participants were the eleventh-grade science students, and data were collected through tests, observations, questionnaires, and interviews. Audiobook-based instruction was integrated into reading activities using narrative texts, enabling students to listen while reading and discuss content collaboratively. The first findings demonstrate that the implementation of Classroom Action Research (CAR) led to significant improvements in student engagement and reading comprehension. Key factors contributing to this improvement included the integration of audiobook-based texts with pre-lesson questions, the creation of vocabulary lists for unfamiliar words, and the implementation of group discussions as a strategy to foster active participation and enhance student motivation. The second findings revealed a significant increase in students' reading comprehension, evidenced by rising average post-test scores across cycles: from 68.70 in Cycle 1, to 72.56 in Cycle 2, and 75.48 in Cycle 3, compared to the pre-test average of 61.81. The third findings reveals that, although audiobooks were effective in enhancing students' reading comprehension, several technical and pedagogical challenges were encountered, particularly in remote or resource-limited settings. Issues such as poor audio quality, lack of personal listening devices, and unreliable internet access posed significant barriers to the successful implementation of audiobooks. Finally, the CAR process also revealed positive student responses, contributing to the overall success of the approach. The results showed that the average score across all students was 4.0 on a 1–5 scale, with 5 representing the most positive response. This indicated generally positive responses toward the use of audiobooks in the classroom.

**Keywords:** *Audiobooks; Reading Comprehension; Classroom Action Research; Remote Education; EFL learners; Student Engagement*

## **Introduction**

The ability to read effectively is a critical skill that forms the foundation for academic success and lifelong learning. In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), reading comprehension serves as a vital component of language acquisition. However, many students, particularly in non-native settings, face significant challenges in mastering reading comprehension skills. This issue is compounded by various factors, such as limited vocabulary, insufficient exposure to English-language texts, and unengaging teaching methods that fail to foster motivation. The complexity of reading in English, with its distinct linguistic, lexical, and syntactic structures, further hinders students' ability to comprehend texts effectively (Rahman & Hajar, 2020).

In many EFL classrooms, students often struggle to fully grasp the meaning of reading materials, despite intensive instruction. This is particularly evident in regions where access to diverse, engaging resources is limited, and traditional teaching methods may not adequately address the diverse learning needs of students (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016). For example, in remote areas, such as in the Senior High School of MA Nurhidayah Bontomanai, students face additional barriers due to their limited exposure to English texts outside the classroom. These challenges result in a marked decline in reading comprehension achievements, as evidenced by the low average scores in annual English reading comprehension exams (Examination Report, 2023).

Several studies have highlighted the importance of addressing these barriers through innovative approaches. Research suggests that incorporating technology into reading instruction—such as the use of audiobooks—can significantly enhance students' engagement and comprehension. Audiobooks, which combine auditory and visual learning modalities, offer a unique advantage by providing students with access to native-speaker pronunciations, improving vocabulary acquisition, and reinforcing the comprehension of textual content (Larson, 2015; Wolfson, 2008). Moreover, audiobooks can serve as an effective tool to address the needs of diverse learners, including those with special educational needs or those who are reluctant readers (Neuman & Celano, 2006).

The primary goal of this study is to explore how the integration of audiobooks into EFL classrooms can enhance students' reading comprehension. This research specifically focuses on the impact of audiobooks in a remote high school setting, where students' limited access to English resources poses a unique challenge. By examining the role of audiobooks in fostering both linguistic and cognitive engagement, this study aims to provide valuable insights into the potential of this tool to bridge educational gaps in resource-constrained environments.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

This study involved Grade XI students from MA Nurhidayah Bontomanai, a senior high school located in a remote area of Indonesia. These students were selected due to their challenges with reading comprehension in English. Preliminary observations and discussions with the English teacher revealed that students struggled with understanding texts and showed low engagement with traditional reading methods. The students' accessibility to technology was also a factor considered during their selection for the study.

### **Research Design and Procedures**

The research employed a **Classroom Action Research (CAR)** design, which is a participatory and cyclical process aimed at improving teaching practices and learning outcomes. The design consists of

four stages: planning, action, observation, and reflection. These stages are repeated across **three cycles**, each aimed at refining interventions to meet the desired results. In **Cycle 1**, the teacher (who also served as the researcher) planned and implemented lessons integrating audiobooks as the primary resource for reading activities. The students were encouraged to listen to the audiobooks while following along with the printed text, engaging in various activities such as vocabulary exercises, comprehension questions, and group discussions to enhance their understanding. In **Cycle 2**, based on feedback from Cycle 1, adjustments were made to the lesson plans. This included refining the selection of audiobooks, adding new vocabulary-building activities, and modifying the pace of the lessons to better align with the students' needs. Finally, **Cycle 3** focused on final adjustments based on the insights gained from the previous cycles. This cycle aimed to further enhance the effectiveness of the audiobook intervention and address any remaining barriers to comprehension. The intervention took place over **three cycles** with each cycle lasting **one month**. **Cycle 1 and Cycle 2** involved **four meetings** each, while **Cycle 3** involved **three meetings**.

## Instruments

The study employed various data collection instruments to gain a thorough understanding of the impact of audiobooks on students' reading comprehension. Classroom observations were conducted throughout each lesson to monitor the implementation of audiobook-based activities and assess student engagement. A structured checklist was used to evaluate crucial factors such as the teacher's use of audiobooks, student participation, and overall classroom dynamics, with additional field notes taken to document interactions and challenges observed during the lessons. To gain deeper insights into the experiences of both students and the teacher, semi-structured interviews were conducted. These interviews provided perspectives on the effectiveness of the audiobook-based lessons and how the method impacted student learning. Additionally, open-ended questionnaires were distributed to students at the conclusion of the intervention, allowing them to share their views on the audiobook method, specifically regarding its influence on their motivation, reading interest, and comprehension skills. Finally, pre- and post-tests were administered to evaluate improvements in students' reading comprehension. These tests included a mix of multiple-choice and short-answer questions, focusing on the texts that students had listened to and read during the study, offering a measurable gauge of their progress.

## Data Analysis

Data from the observations, interviews, questionnaires, and tests were analyzed using **qualitative and quantitative methods**. **Qualitative Data:** Thematic analysis was conducted on interview responses and field notes to identify patterns related to student engagement, teacher strategies, and the challenges of using audiobooks in the classroom. **Quantitative Data:** Pre- and post-test scores were analyzed to evaluate the impact of the audiobook intervention on students' reading comprehension. Comparisons were made between students' performance before and after the intervention to measure any improvements.

## Research Timeline

The study was conducted over three cycles: Cycle 1 focused on introducing the audiobooks and assessing their immediate impact on student comprehension. Cycle 2 involved revising the lesson plans and methods based on feedback and observations from Cycle 1 to enhance the effectiveness of the audiobook intervention. Cycle 3 aimed at making final refinements to the lesson plans and evaluating the overall impact of the intervention. Each cycle lasted for one month, with two lessons held per week. Observations and data collection were carried out continuously throughout the duration of the study to ensure comprehensive information regarding the implementation and outcomes of the intervention.

## **Result and Discussion**

This study's findings emphasize the significant impact of Classroom Action Research (CAR) in enhancing student engagement and reading comprehension in EFL classrooms. Four major findings emerged during the study:

### **1. Improvement in Student Engagement and Reading Comprehension**

The integration of audiobooks, coupled with pre-lesson questions, vocabulary lists, and group discussions, notably boosted student engagement and reading comprehension. Audiobooks, as a pedagogical tool, provide auditory input, which helps students improve both their listening and reading comprehension skills simultaneously (Larson, 2015). The pre-lesson questions primed students for the material, while vocabulary lists enabled them to tackle unfamiliar words effectively, fostering better understanding of the texts. Group discussions encouraged active participation, thereby motivating students to engage more deeply with the lesson content. This aligns with findings from Jabu and Muliati (2019), who emphasized that presenting enjoyable and interactive materials can motivate students to engage in reading comprehension activities, making learning more enjoyable and effective.

### **2. Increase in Reading Comprehension Scores**

The impact of audiobook integration was measured through students' reading comprehension scores from the pre-test and three post-tests conducted at the end of each cycle. The assessment aimed to track students' progress and identify improvements in their understanding of reading texts.

Based on the data, there was a steady increase in students' reading comprehension scores after each cycle. The pre-test average score was 60.70, which rose to 66.70 after the first cycle. This early improvement indicates that even the initial exposure to audiobooks contributed positively to students' understanding of texts. In the second cycle, the average score improved further to 71.78. This can be attributed to the teacher's improved strategies, such as providing repeated listening opportunities and incorporating group discussions to clarify difficult parts of the audiobook.

Finally, in the third cycle, the students achieved an average score of 74.85, showing a consistent upward trend. This result suggests that with continued use, audiobooks became more effective in supporting students' reading development. The repeated listening, combined with vocabulary preview and structured comprehension tasks, enhanced their ability to process and retain information from texts. These findings demonstrate that audiobooks are not only a helpful supplementary tool but also an effective media to improve students' reading comprehension skills in EFL contexts, especially when used consistently and adaptively within a classroom action research framework.

The implementation of audiobooks led to a steady increase in students' reading comprehension, as indicated by the rising average post-test scores across cycles. From 68.70 in Cycle 1, to 72.56 in Cycle 2, and 75.48 in Cycle 3, these scores were a clear improvement over the pre-test average of 61.81. This improvement supports research by Chen (2021) and Rasinski & Padak (2004), who observed that audiobooks significantly enhance reading comprehension, particularly by providing students with fluent models of reading and helping them connect spoken and written forms of language. Moreover, this improvement in reading comprehension also highlights the positive impact of multimodal learning environments, where auditory and visual stimuli work together to reinforce the learning process (Paivio, 1990).

### 3. Challenges in Audiobook Implementation

The implementation of audiobooks in reading instruction at remote senior high schools revealed several challenges, particularly in the early cycles of the research. These challenges were predominantly technical and pedagogical, requiring thoughtful reflection and adjustments by the teacher to facilitate an effective learning experience. One of the primary technical challenges was related to the quality of the equipment used. In the initial phase of the study, audio quality was subpar due to basic speaker equipment, which hindered students' ability to clearly hear and understand the content of the audiobook. This issue was particularly pronounced in remote senior high schools, where low-quality speakers often resulted in unclear audio, making it difficult for students to follow along with the narration. Furthermore, the absence of personal listening devices, such as headphones, exacerbated the problem, especially in large classrooms where background noise was a frequent distraction. As one student expressed, *"Sometimes I have difficulty focusing because of the noise from other friends or if the sound quality is not clear"* (Student 1), while another added, *"The main challenge is the sound quality which is sometimes unclear"* (Student 5).

Moreover, limited access to the internet posed a significant barrier. In remote areas, unreliable internet connections made it difficult for students to download or stream audiobooks. This challenge was compounded by the school's limited technological resources, including a shortage of computers and tablets for all students. The situation was further exacerbated by frequent power outages, which disrupted the use of electronic devices required for audiobook listening. These technical issues severely limited the accessibility of audiobooks and made their integration into the classroom challenging.

To address these technical challenges, a practical solution was implemented. The researcher began downloading audiobook materials from YouTube, which were then played directly to the students. The audiobook, such as *Folklore*, was downloaded from YouTube and used as an audio teaching material. After downloading the audio, the researcher either printed the transcript provided with the video or manually transcribed the dialogue. This transcript was then distributed to the students, allowing them to follow along with the text while listening to the audiobook. This solution not only overcame the issue of unreliable internet access but also introduced a multisensory learning experience. By allowing students to listen to the audiobook while simultaneously reading the printed text, the method supported comprehension and retention. Furthermore, once the audiobook was downloaded, it could be played in class without requiring an active internet connection, ensuring all students could access the material regardless of network conditions. This approach enabled students to engage actively with the content, leading to a deeper understanding of the material.

On the pedagogical side, many students struggled with learning through listening, as they were unfamiliar with this method of instruction. This shift to audio-based learning was not seamless, and students faced difficulties in maintaining focus and participation. Many students found it hard to keep up with the speed of the narration, especially when the audiobook was played too quickly, or when they missed parts of the narration. This resulted in students losing track of the material. As one student explained, *"There were times when the audiobook sound was unclear or fast, so I had trouble following along"* (Student 8). Additionally, students faced challenges in retaining information, especially when the vocabulary used in the audiobook was unfamiliar. This highlighted the need for instructional strategies such as repeated listening, vocabulary previews, and comprehension scaffolding to aid in the understanding and retention of the material. Classroom management also proved to be a challenge, as some students were easily distracted and struggled to stay engaged during the audiobook sessions, which affected their comprehension and participation.

To address these pedagogical challenges, the teacher introduced several strategies. These included improving the technical setup with clearer audio equipment, as well as organizing students into

smaller groups to optimize listening conditions. These adjustments gradually reduced the initial difficulties, leading to improved classroom participation and understanding.

Ultimately, despite the challenges faced in using audiobooks as a teaching media in remote senior high schools, these challenges were effectively addressed through reflective teaching practices and strategic adjustments. The integration of audiobooks into the classroom improved as both technical factors and classroom conditions were carefully considered. By adopting a solution that combined offline access, multisensory support, and thoughtful instructional strategies, audiobooks became a more effective and engaging learning tool for students. This approach demonstrates the potential of audiobooks to overcome barriers in remote educational settings, where access to technology and internet connectivity can often be limited. Through these innovations, audiobooks were successfully integrated into the classroom, enriching the learning experience for students and providing an accessible alternative for remote educational contexts.

While the use of audiobooks had positive effects on student engagement and comprehension, the study also encountered several technical and pedagogical challenges. Issues such as poor audio quality, lack of personal listening devices, and unreliable internet access impeded the effectiveness of the audiobook-based lessons, especially in remote or resource-limited settings. Similar challenges were reported by Rahman and Hajar (2020), who noted that rural schools often face significant barriers in implementing digital tools due to insufficient technological infrastructure. To address these challenges, they recommended the development of offline audiobook solutions, which could ensure consistent access to materials despite technical constraints.

#### 4. Positive Student Responses

Students' responses to the audiobook integration were overwhelmingly positive, with an average score of 4.0 on a 1–5 scale. This finding aligns with the research of Moore & Cahill (2016), who found that audiobooks can motivate reluctant readers and enhance their engagement with the material. The students in this study expressed enjoyment in the learning process, finding the audiobook-based approach more engaging and less intimidating than traditional reading methods. This positive feedback underscores the potential of audiobooks to create a more inclusive and interactive learning environment, fostering better student participation and motivation (Best & Clark, 2021).

#### Conclusion

The findings of this study demonstrated that the integration of audiobooks in the classroom significantly improved students' reading comprehension, engagement, and motivation. Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that the integration of audiobooks in the teaching of reading was highly effective in improving students' reading comprehension and engagement. The following conclusions are drawn from the four key findings:

**First**, the implementation of audiobooks significantly enhanced students' motivation, participation, and interaction with reading tasks. Prior to the introduction of audiobooks, students exhibited low motivation and limited interaction during reading lessons. However, after the integration of audiobooks, there was a marked increase in student engagement, which is consistent with **Mayer's Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning (2005)** and **Paivio's Dual Coding Theory (1986)**. These theories emphasize the benefits of combining auditory and visual stimuli, which helped students process information more effectively and reinforced their understanding of the material.

**Second**, audiobooks had a clear and measurable impact on students' reading comprehension. The steady increase in post-test scores from Cycle 1 to Cycle 3, with the final post-test showing an average score

of 74.85, indicates that repeated exposure to audiobooks led to improvements in comprehension. This aligns with **Zimmerman's Self-Regulated Learning Theory (2000)**, which suggests that the audiobooks helped students develop self-regulation skills by making them more conscious of their learning processes. The engagement with audiobooks provided students with a structured approach to understanding the material, which in turn improved their reading comprehension over time.

**Third**, although audiobooks were effective, several technical and pedagogical challenges were encountered, particularly in remote or resource-limited settings. The issues related to audio quality, lack of personal listening devices, and unreliable internet access were significant barriers to the successful implementation of audiobooks. However, the researcher addressed these challenges by downloading the audiobooks and providing printed transcripts, which allowed students to follow along with the audio. This strategy not only solved the technical problems but also aligned with **Mayer's Multimedia Principle (2021)** and **Sweller's Cognitive Load Theory (2011)**, which emphasize the importance of minimizing cognitive load and providing multisensory learning experiences. The use of group discussions further supported this approach by helping students process the material in a collaborative manner. **Last**, the students' responses to the use of audiobooks were overwhelmingly positive, with many students expressing that audiobooks made reading more enjoyable, engaging, and easier to understand. This finding aligns with **Jenson (2018)** and **Hodges and Perry (2020)**, who highlighted the benefits of audiobooks in improving language skills, including pronunciation and comprehension. The integration of group discussions also fostered a more interactive learning environment, supporting **Vygotsky's Social Constructivism (1978)**, which emphasizes the role of social interaction in the learning process. By participating in discussions, students were able to deepen their understanding of the text, ask questions, and reflect on the material, leading to improved comprehension. In conclusion, this study demonstrates that the use of audiobooks can significantly improve students' reading comprehension and motivation, particularly when challenges such as technical issues and classroom management are effectively.

## Acknowledgement

The researcher would like to thank the principal, Wilda Ramadani, S.Pd, staff, and students of MA Nurhidayah Bontomanai for providing information to facilitate research. The researcher also would like to express his deepest gratitude to the Education Fund Management Institution (LPDP and BPPT) under the Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Indonesia for sponsoring my master's study, as well as for their support for this paper and publication.

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