

Want to spur your child's intellectual development? Use audiobooks instead of videos, says researcher

July 17 2024, by Andrey Vyshedskiy



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It's not uncommon today to see children glued to their screens. In fact, 80% of parents with children 11 or younger say their kids watch

YouTube videos, according to a [2020 Pew Research Center poll](#). Half of these parents say their kids watch videos every day—some even several times a day.

But staring at a screen for too long can negatively impact children's well-being—[even creating dependency](#). According to research, kids demonstrate [less curiosity, self-control and emotional stability](#) when their screen time surpasses one hour a day. They are also more likely to experience anxiety and depression and suffer from [sleep disruptions, obesity and impaired social skills](#). Even short, fast-paced videos have consequences, impacting the [self-regulation and working memory of young children](#).

I believe it is essential to explore how to use technology in a way that can positively impact children's ability to think and communicate. Audiobooks present a compelling case.

Starting around [three and a half years of age](#), most children can comprehend simple stories and fairy tales. Audiobooks can be particularly useful during car rides, bedtime routine and quiet playtime. For [school-aged children](#), they can [engage reluctant readers](#) by providing an alternative way to experience books. And most importantly, they can [nurture kids' intellectual growth](#)—much more than videos.

Here are five ways that audiobooks can enhance children's ability to learn:

Enhancing imagination and intelligence

Unlike videos, which provide visual and [auditory stimuli](#), audiobooks rely solely on listening. This encourages children to visualize the story in their minds, [training them to use their voluntary imagination](#). In contrast, passive videos provide preformed images that require no voluntary

[imagination](#).

Unlike [involuntary imagination](#), which happens spontaneously and unintentionally, such as in a dream during sleep, [voluntary imagination](#) is the deliberate effort to create new images in the mind. People are not born with this ability. Rather, it must be [actively developed](#) during childhood through conversations and engagement with stories and fairy tales.

Research indicates that voluntary imagination leads to [improved problem-solving skills](#). In fact, training voluntary imagination is [crucial for intellectual development](#).

Developing listening skills and attention span

Listening to audiobooks requires children to focus and pay attention to the spoken word, promoting the [development of listening skills](#). Unlike the passive consumption of videos, where the visual component dominates a child's attention, comprehending an audiobook demands active listening. This can improve a child's ability to concentrate and maintain attention for longer periods.

Expanding vocabulary and language skills

Audiobooks are a [valuable tool](#) for expanding a child's [vocabulary and enhancing language skills](#). Exposure to rich and varied language allows children to encounter new words and phrases in context, which aids in [understanding and retention](#).

Compared with [print books](#), audiobooks feature expressive narration, which can model proper pronunciation, intonation and rhythm.

Encouraging independent learning

Audiobooks can foster a sense of independence in [young children](#) as they create their own unique vision of the scenes and events described in a book. This can cultivate a habit of independent learning as children follow complex narratives, infer meaning and make connections between different parts of the story. This self-directed learning approach can [improve self-esteem and study skills](#) and lay a strong foundation for future academic success.

Preserving eyesight

Excessive screen time can strain children's eyes, leading to discomfort and potential [long-term vision problems](#), including nearsightedness. Audiobooks, on the other hand, eliminate the need for screens, giving children's eyes a much-needed break.

Audiobooks are a powerful tool for enhancing a child's cognitive and linguistic development, and many are available for free at local libraries or on apps like [LibriVox](#). As [parents](#) and educators seek to nurture smarter and more well-rounded children, [audiobooks](#) can play a significant role.

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