

A Review of Research on Chinese Children's Reading Ability Using Audiobooks

LI LI

Infrastructure University Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
lvily@foxmail.com

CHANG PENG KEE*

Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia
chang@ukm.edu.my

**Corresponding Author*

ABSTRACT

The rapid popularisation and continuous development of digital technology have brought major changes to people's reading methods and the number of digital reading methods, including listening to books, has been increasing year by year. As Chinese parents are making more investment in their children's education and cultivation of reading habits, they have paid special attention to audiobooks as they serve as sources of entertainment and education, and can also be used widely by Chinese preschools. This article classifies and analyses the themes and contents of audiobooks used by children in China in multiple dimensions, examines the deficiencies of existing research, gives references to children's basic education reading as well as practical countermeasures and prospects for children's embedded learning systems. The countermeasures and prospects of the Chinese Academy of Sciences can provide some enlightenment to teachers engaged in basic education and give assistance to the development of children's audio reading in China's basic education.

Keywords: audiobooks; basic education; children; reading; school

INTRODUCTION

Children's reading is the starting point of national reading. The cultivation of children's reading habits and the level of reading ability are related to the future of a country (Cai, 2016). Audiobooks are popular among audiences, especially children, because of their diverse carriers, rich and diverse content and convenient and quick application. The 18th National Reading Survey Report released by the China Press and Publication Research Institute shows that in 2020, the listening rate of children aged 0–17 in China is 32.5%, which is an increase of 6.3 percentage points from 2018, with 0–8 years old. The listening rate of children is 33.5%, (Wei & Xu, 2020). Today, with the popularisation of higher education, parents' academic qualifications have generally improved, and the importance of their children's enlightenment education has also increased, gradually focusing on cultivating children's reading habits. For children, audio reading lowers the reading threshold and is a more effective and direct way of reading. Audiobooks have the advantages of rich content, diverse carriers and convenient use. An increasing number of parents choose to let their children read by sound (Sun, 2019). Children's audio reading continues to grow rapidly, becoming a new growth point in national reading. An increasing number of children are willing to use audio reading that is not restricted by time and place to enrich their free and fragmented personal time. An increasing number of educational institutions use audiobooks to share knowledge with children, which has attracted increasing attention in the field of research.

This article attempts to understand the current situation of children's audio reading in China. It sorts out and analyses information from multiple dimensions of children's audio reading

literature, application value, dissemination, promotion and innovative development to provide future theoretical research and practical applications in this field.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Figure 1 shows that in the past five years, the number of research papers on children's audiobooks in China has shown an overall upward trend. Since 2015, the number of published articles has continued to increase, and the overall trend has been enriched year by year. According to the "Research Report on the Mobile Audio Reading Market in the First Quarter of 2018", 2016 to 2018 was the fastest-growing three years in the audio reading market, and the number of articles posted doubled compared with 2015. Under this development background and premise, the number of papers published in my country's minor audiobook research continued to increase rapidly in 2019, and the growth continued to accelerate compared with 2017 and 2018, reaching a peak of 23 papers. With the continuous development of the modern Internet, smart terminals and digital media technologies, audiobooks are becoming increasingly popular among minors. Chee and Tan (2021) said that the use of social media application promotes motivation, positive learning attitudes and encourage active participation. Figure 2 shows that after 2015, the number of audio reading research literature has also continued to increase.

This field has attracted the attention of industry insiders, reflecting the promotion of the development of audio reading by smart terminals. The research on audio reading with children in China as the research object can only attract further attention from the whole of society and promote the increasing standardisation of the entire process of audiobook resources from production, publication and distribution, operation and dissemination to reading promotion, thereby promoting the widespread development of national reading activities in China, ultimately establishing a scholarly society.

FIGURE 1. Number of articles posted

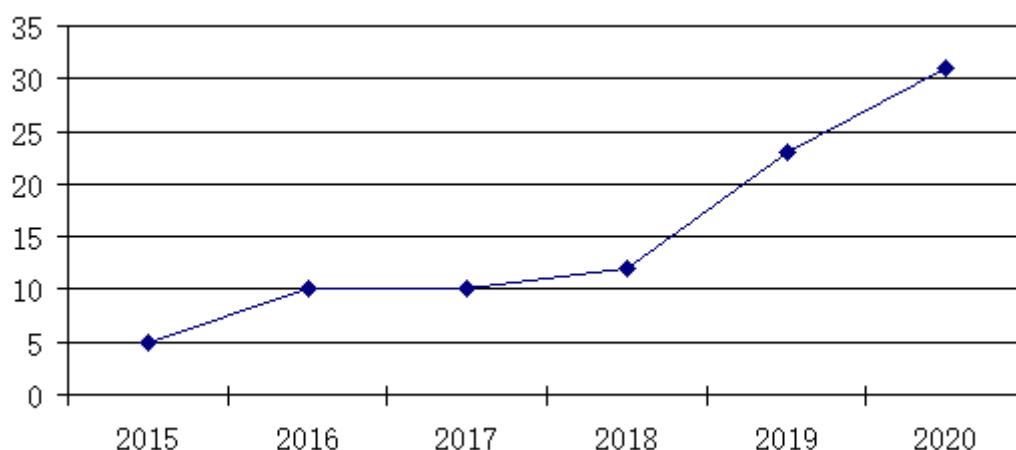
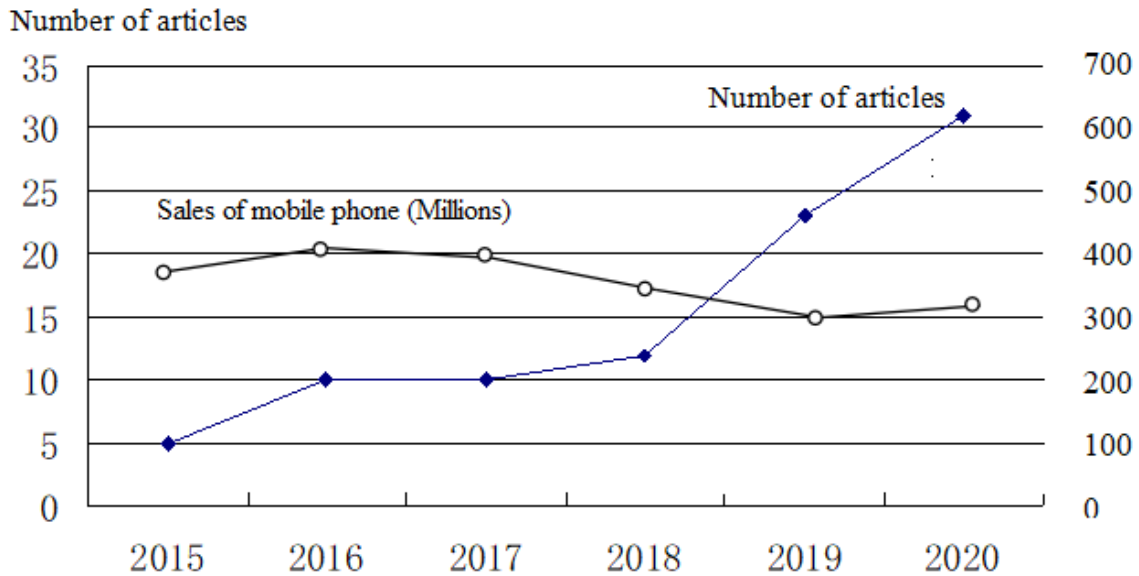


FIGURE 2. Relationship between smartphone sales and the number of research documents



AUDIOBOOK DEFINITION

Audiobooks are defined in Chinese dictionaries as "data recorded on tapes", and English as "audiobooks". As the usage rate of electronic devices continues to increase, audiobooks in the form of tapes as storage media have gradually faded out of the public. More people are using digital tools such as iPad to read audiobooks. Therefore, the definition of the American Audiobook Association is no longer applicable today. It can be seen that the new definition of audiobooks by electronics, combined with the current development of audiobooks, believes that the definition of audiobooks should be: "Based on words, using tapes, CDs or mobile devices as carriers, applying digital technology to performers The played text is stored in a digital file, and the recording product can be listened to online or downloaded through the digital player. In recent years, research on audiobooks by Chinese domestic scholars has shown an upward trend. At present, the academic research on audiobooks in the academic circle mainly focuses on the following aspects.

The first aspect is the research on the definition of audiobooks. Domestic scholars' research on the definition of audiobooks focused on the early development of audiobooks, that is, the period when tapes and CDs were the main carriers. At present, two types of audiobook concepts are recognised by academic circles. The most authoritative and most cited is the definition of the Audio Publishers Association: an audiobook contains no less than 51% of the text content packaged into cassette tapes, high-density optical discs or simply digital files for sale (Chang, 2004). This definition now seems to have certain limitations. The second type of concept is the new definition of Chinese practitioners. For example, broadcast practitioners (Huang, H. 2012) expanded the scope of the definition of audiobooks in "The Broadcasting Interpretation of Audiobooks". "Audiobooks" usually refers to sound recordings that are recorded, packaged and sold using tapes, CDs, or other digital audio methods, generally referring to all "audio products" whose main selling point is "listening and reading" by ears.

The second aspect is the research on the audience of audiobooks. As the carriers of audiobooks are becoming increasingly diverse, the content is becoming more abundant and the use is more convenient, making the scope of its audience expand. (Jiang, Y. 2016) In "Listening to Books: A New Way of Reading in the Internet + Era", Chinese audiobook audiences are divided into three categories. The first category is audiences restricted by reading text, such as drivers, sportspeople working people and housewives. The second category is audiences who lack reading ability, such as blind people, young children and the elderly. The third category is

young people who are interested in audiobooks. Yang, H (2016) listed online game enthusiasts and novel enthusiasts as the readers of audiobooks for the first time in the “Analysis of the Development of My Country’s ‘Listening’ Industry under the Internet and Benchmarking Strategies”.

The third aspect is research on audiobook apps. Since 2012, audiobook apps have been launched in rapid succession. Lazy Tingshu and Himalaya FM entered the Chinese listening book market first, followed by Dragonfly FM and Litchi FM. Knowledge payment platforms and audio platforms have increasingly entered the audio market. These apps have become the subject of intensive research by scholars and the industry, and the research focus is mainly on the profitability of their production models. In “Research on the Profit Model of Audiobooks in the Era of We Media-Taking Himalaya FM as an Example” (Wang, X. 2018), two content production models in the Himalayas are analysed: the UGC mode (user-produced content) and PGC mode (professional production content). Its five profit models, namely, community economic model, advertising and marketing model, content channel linkage model, personalised derivative product model, paid listening model, were also investigated. App operation was proposed to focus on enhancements such as improving user stickiness, extending the audiobook value chain and strengthening copyright protection.

THE VALUE OF AUDIOBOOKS

In the era of new media, as a new type of reading method, audio reading has received the attention, promotion and recognition of many scholars. The continuous development of audio reading towards diversification, while expanding children’s mental inspiration and education channels and methods, audiobooks have also made considerable changes in their product form, communication and consumption methods. The research and analysis of audiobooks’ value are important to the times and society. At the same time, the rational and effective use of children’s audiobooks will have a huge positive impact on the growth of contemporary children.

According to Yan (2016), children’s audiobooks have three values: entertainment, education and practice. Therefore, research and analysis of their value have important time significance and practical social value. (Wang, Y. 2019) explains the value of audiobooks from three aspects: stimulating children’s interest in reading, promoting children’s physical and mental development and enlightening children’s thinking and judgment. (Zhang, W. 2018) believes that a bridge can be built between the audio-visual “happy” reading activities and the cultivation of children’s learning quality. The use of audio-based “happy reading” as an activity carrier for cultivating children’s learning qualities is precisely the concept of innovative education (Zhou, G. 2019). Research and practice indicate that audio reading is effective in broadening the horizons of primary school students, stimulating reading interest, improving listening, speaking, reading and writing skills and cultivating students’ quality. Audio reading, in an irreplaceable role, is even more effective in protecting eyesight.

PROMOTING COMMUNICATION RESEARCH

Audio reading has the advantages of diversified carrier forms, rich content, lively language and availability anytime and anywhere. Audio reading has been loved by readers and aroused children’s interest in reading. The importance of audio reading to children’s growth and development and how to promote audio reading for them have been recognised and valued by an increasing number of scholars.

Combining listening to books reading, it can be a useful strategy for primary school students focusing on listening to books (Chen, 2018). (Shang & Jiang, 2018) elaborated on the specific strategies that libraries need to use to promote children’s audio reading, from the analysis of

children's needs for audiobooks and the importance of audio reading to children's growth and development. Based on the analysis of the positive impact of audiobooks on the growth of left-behind children in rural areas, the feasibility of carrying out audiobook reading promotion among these children is explored, and solutions to the existing problems are proposed (Chen, E. 2017). Under the current high myopia rate in China, the practice of "listening to books" activities are carried out in terms of the value of listening to books, the choice of listening content and time and the measures that can be taken to enhance learning functions when listening to books (Gao, Y. 2012). The children's audiobook market should establish a future-oriented content original mechanism, use audiobooks as the research object, use relevant theories, analyse the characteristics of audiobooks and the marketing process and combine questionnaire surveys and typical industry cases to question the development of audiobooks exploration and associated countermeasures (Huang, X. 2019).

At present, audio reading for minors has received insufficient attention. Few professionals are engaged in this topical research, and the research results are likewise minimal. Only 42 related studies have been published in the past five years. This type of research is particularly prominent across multiple fields due to the characteristics of audio reading, and the results of scientific research are scattered. A systematic theoretical research system has not yet been formed in the aspects of audiobook copyright introduction, audio production, publication and distribution, planning and operation, promotion and application, market supervision and social benefit evaluation, especially for the scope of minors.

Overall, Chinese scholars currently focus on the discussion of basic issues such as value, market, promotion and development strategies for audiobooks for minors, and the research level is relatively shallow. In addition, of the 42 research articles, only approximately 12% are published in core journals, and the quality of research results is low. The selected literature shows that the research related to this topic is mainly concentrated in the Chinese field, and introductions, research and reference on the development of audiobooks for minors abroad are lacking.

BASIC EDUCATION INNOVATION RESEARCH

With the continuous development of the mobile Internet era, scholars have proposed innovative development strategies for the future of audio reading around the new appearance of audiobooks and the enhancement of the content value and communication influence of audiobooks to provide theoretical thinking and reference suggestions.

From the perspective of research content, researchers currently analyse and research audiobooks from multiple dimensions such as publishing, education and library services. From how traditional publishing houses break through the traditional publication model and gradually transform to digital publishing houses and truly integrate technology to produce creative audio content for minors, to how kindergartens and schools take advantage of audiobooks. Apply it to daily teaching, systematically incorporate audiobooks into students' reading system, stimulate their interest in reading, enrich their reading content, open another door to reading for them, and how the library can help minors. This can construct an audiobook resource system, thereby expanding the resource construction strategy of the library service boundary.

From the perspective of research methods, research on the audio reading of Chinese minors mainly adopts theoretical explanations based on written descriptions, including theoretical analysis and strategy proposals. Empirical research methods, such as interviews and surveys, questionnaire surveys and experimental methods, are used in the papers, but they are relatively few in general.

By analysing the platform, socialisation, contextualisation and diversification of the development of children's audiobooks, the development of children's audiobooks should increase the construction of subject knowledge and reading by category and age (Chen, 2019). Children's audio reading should construct multiple dialogues, focusing on "real dialogue" that is direct and interactive (Wang, Y. 2018). Li (2018) combined the actual work of Shandong Education Publishing House to promote the children's audiobook platform. Li also analyse and summarised the rapid development of the online community in such promotion and provided a reference for the relevant work operation of educational publishing companies. Due to the impact of three major factors: the value of educational content resources of children's audio books, the spread of communication channels, and the recognition of audiences, more attention should be paid to children's sense of experience in the process of children's listening (Kong, J. 2018).

SUGGESTIONS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN'S AUDIOBOOKS

In summary, in recent years, although some results have been achieved in the research on children's audio reading in China, many shortcomings remain in practical application and theoretical research, which need to be continuously improved and perfected.

FORMULATE STANDARDS AND SPECIFICATIONS FOR AUDIOBOOK PUBLISHING

Compared with foreign countries, China's children's audiobook industry has not yet formed a complete industry standard. Audiobook content varies from good to bad, especially as regards the quality standards of children's audiobook content and playback equipment. Corresponding industry standards are urgently needed to regulate and guide its production, publication and distribution. In 2007, the American National Standards Institute issued the "Digital Audiobook File Format and Player Requirements" related standard documents (Digital Audiobook File Format and Player Requirements, 2020). In 2019, the National Press and Publication Administration released CY/T183.1-2019 "Audiobooks Part 1: Recording Production", CY/T 183.2-2019 "Audiobooks Part 2: Publishing Platform" and CY/T 183.3-2019 and "Audiobooks Part 3: Quality Requirements and Evaluation". These three industry standards set out specific requirements from the three aspects of audiobook recording production, publishing platform and quality requirements and evaluation (National Press and Publication Administration, 2020). This release not only addresses an objective demand for the future development of audiobooks but is also an important step to fundamentally promote the domestic children's audiobook market towards standardisation and internationalisation.

GIVE FULL PLAY TO THE FUNCTIONS OF INDUSTRY ORGANISATIONS

In 1987, the American Audiobook Publishers Association was established. It is composed of audiobook producers, distributors and retailers. It aims to enhance the value of audiobook products, provide suggestions on industry technical standards and provide members with network communication, training and Information platforms (Editorial Department, 2019). In 2000, the Federation of German Audiobook Publishers was established to promote the development of the German audiobook market. Compared with European and American countries, the China Audiovisual and Digital Publishing Association, as the only national audiovisual and digital publishing industry organisation in China, established its Audiobook Professional Committee relatively late. The committee is restricted by many factors such as its own reading technology and market. The performance of maintaining and promoting the development of China's audio reading industry is low. In recent years, as the development of audio reading has attracted increasing attention from the industry, the number of exchanges

and seminars related to audio reading has gradually increased. In 2018, the Audiobook Professional Committee of the China Audiovisual and Digital Publishing Association organised the Audiobook Ecological Conference and proposed the concept of “Audiobook Ecosphere”. Discuss in-depth from multiple perspectives such as the cultural and ecological environment of audiobook reading, platform transformation and upgrading, operation promotion, and social benefits, so as to build an industry consensus. These changes are gratifying, indicating the fast and healthy development of the industry.

APPLICATION OF EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION AND INTERACTIVE PARTICIPATION METHODS

At present, research on children’s audio reading in China is mainly based on written explanations. The value of children’s audio reading and the role of reading promotion have mainly been explored theoretically, and empirical research such as questionnaires is lacking. As a type of activity performance, research on audio reading behaviour should focus more on empirical objectivity. In the future, industry theoretical research should be combined with empirical research. It should focus not only on the theory and practice of audio reading but also on the interaction and participation of child readers and adopt flexible and diverse methods to ensure scientific and rigorous research discourse. Such research can also use new technologies and new models to enhance the entertainment of the audio reading and so attract more children.

CONCLUSION

The importance of reading for the growth of young people and the development of a country and society is well understood. With their unique advantages, audiobooks have become an effective supplement to paper books and e-books, and they have played a positive role in increasing children’s interest in reading and boosting the development of reading for all (Wang, M. 2019). With the popularisation and development of smart terminals, users use them to increasingly participate in audio reading. At present, although practical studies have been published on the teaching practice of Chinese children’s audio reading, they are relatively few. Teaching institutions such as kindergartens and schools are important places for children to learn. Audiobooks should be systematically incorporated into a school’s reading teaching system. Audiobooks increase the effective ways to improve children’s language literacy and considerably enrich their reading volume, thereby opening up another way for them to learn.

The basic education application of children’s audio reading provides us with a new way of education and teaching. The application also represents a new educational inspiration and teaching innovation for teachers of basic education. The application needs strong support from relevant national technical departments and continuous creation from the majority of developers focusing on the actual needs of children. The education department needs to concentrate on researching talent training programs to open up new ideas and new paths for the development of children’s audio reading and to build a new culture. Audiobooks play an important role in proliferating positions, expanding spiritual living spaces and promoting the vigorous development of basic education.

REFERENCES

- Cai, Q. (2016). Foreign Reading Legislation: Status Quo, Features and References. *Library Journal*, 35(8), 29-35.
- Chang, X. (2004). The market space of audio books in my country. *Editor's Friends*, (4), 30-32.

- Chee, K. M., & Tan, K. H. (2021). QR Codes as a Potential Tool in Teaching and Learning Pronunciation: A Critical Review. *Higher Education and Oriental Studies*, 1(1), 31-44.
- Chen, B. (2018). *The influence of listening to books on the effect of reading promotion for primary school students*. [Dissertation]. Chongqing Southwest University.
- Chen, B. (2019). Let "reading" truly become "pleasant reading"-a new development of children's audio books. *Editing Journal*, (5), 63-68.
- Chen, E. (2017). Research on the Reading Promotion of Audiobooks for Left-behind Children in Rural Areas. *Journal of Agricultural Information*, 29(10), 127-130.
- Digital Audiobook File Format and Player Requirements. (2020). <http://www.doc88.com/p-1456996934155.html>
- Editorial Department. (2019). "Academic Publishing Standards-Definition of Academic Misconduct in Journals (cy/t174-2019)" was officially released and implemented. Powder Metallurgy Industry (4).
- Gao, Y. (2012). Listening to Books: Reading Choices of Primary School Pupils with High Myopia Rate. *China Educational Technology*, (31), 6-7.
- Huang, H. (2012). Broadcast interpretation of audio books. *Media observation*, (7), 53-54.
- Huang, X. (2019). *Audiobook Marketing in my country under the Theory of 4I*. [Dissertation]. Hunan Normal University.
- Jiang, Y. (2016). "Audio book": new way of reading in the Internet plus Era. *News outpost*, (11), 44-46.
- Kong, J. (2018). *Development strategy of audiobooks from the perspective of cultural communication power*. [Dissertation]. Soochow University.
- Li, H. (2018). Research on the development of children's audiobooks from the perspective of online communities. *Research on Communication Power*, 2(21), 41.
- National Press and Publication Administration (2019). Notice on approving and publishing 14 industry standards including "Academic Publishing Specification Form". <http://www.csres.com/notice/52675.html>.
- Shang, S., & Jiang R. (2018). Analysis of the promotion strategy of children's audio reading. *Media Forum*, 1(16), 142-143.
- Sun, L. (2019). *Research on the Development of Children's Audiobooks in Chinese Publishing Organizations*. [Dissertation]. Beijing Institute of Graphic Communication.
- Wang, M. (2019). Use voice to warm up the countryside: a practical study based on audiobooks to promote reading to the countryside. *Library Theory and Practice*, (12), 103-108.
- Wang, X. Research on the profit model of audio books in the era of we media -- Taking Himalayan FM as an example. [Dissertation]. Nanning: Guangxi University, 2018, p:20-27
- Wang, Y. (2019). Analysis on the construction of audiobook resources in children's libraries in the era of national reading. *Library Work and Research*, (9), 117-122.
- Wang, Y. (2018). From "I-it" to "I-you"—Thinking of the "dialogue" of children's audio reading in the era of mobile Internet. *Publishing and Distribution Research*, (9), 93-96.
- Wei, Y. & Xu, S. (2020). The main findings of the 18th National Citizens Reading Survey. *Publication Research* (4), 6.
- Yan, N. (2016). Research on the Value of Children's Audio Books in the New Media Era. *New Media Research*, 2(017), 174-175.
- Yang, H. (2011) Analysis on the development and benchmarking strategy of China's " Audio book " industry under the network. *Friends of editors*, (8), 73-76.
- Zhang, W. (2018). "Happy" reading with sound-a micro-paradigm for cultivating children's learning quality. *Guangxi Education*, (17), 159-160.
- Zhou, G. (2019). *Research on the practice of audio reading in the lower grades of primary school based on mobile audio APP platform*. [Dissertation]. Guangzhou University.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Li Li, is a PhD candidate in communication at Infrastructure University Kuala Lumpur (IUKL), Malaysia. She is also a lecturer at Zhengzhou University of Technology in China. Some of her main research interests are media and communication, and journalism theory.

Chang Peng Kee is an Associate Professor in public relations at the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), and also a visiting professor at Infrastructure University Kuala Lumpur (IUKL). Prior to joining academia, Chang was a PR Manager in a public-listed company. He had also served the military for five years before his tertiary education.