

Technology-Enhanced Audiobooks as Pedagogical Tools for Language Acquisition among South Indian Engineering Students

Dr. G. Sriram¹, Dr. Ragupathi Ramasamy², Dr. T. Charumathy³, Dr. C Tharini⁴, Dr. Premkishor S K⁵, Sathish Kumar C⁶

¹Ap, English,
Saranathan College Of Engineering . Panjappur
Trichy-12. Sriram-Eng@Saranathan.Ac.In
<https://Orcid.Org/0009-0001-0042-9419>

²Associate Professor M. Kumarasamy College Of Engineering, Karur. *Paperrrs@Gmail.Com
<https://Orcid.Org/0000-0003-3415-0333>

³Assistant Professor, Department Of English, Humanities And Science
Rajalakshmi Institute Of Technology, Chennai, Charumathypabhu@Gmail.Com <https://Orcid.Org/0009-0007-2907-8812>

⁴Assistant Professor, English, Vel Tech Rangarajan Dr. Sagunthala R & D Institute Of Science And Technology,
Chennai, Tamilnadu, India. Thara.Rini@Gmail.Com <https://Orcid.Org/0009-0002-8422-4732>

⁵Assistant Professor, English, Easwari Engineering College, Chennai Premkishor.Sk@Eec.Srmrmp.Edu.In
<https://Orcid.Org/0000-0003-0805-5308>

⁶Assistant Professor, Department Of English
Sri Venkateswara College Of Engineering (Autonomous), Pennalur, Sriperumbudur (Tk) 602 117
Pcmsathishkumar@Gmail.Com
<https://Orcid.Org/0000-0002-3692-135x>

ABSTRACT

The proliferation of audio-based digital learning platforms has fundamentally altered pedagogical paradigms in higher education, particularly in English Language Teaching (ELT) within technical institutions. This study investigates the efficacy of technology-enhanced audiobooks, specifically through Amazon Audible platform, as a pedagogical instrument for fostering language acquisition competencies among undergraduate engineering students in South India. Grounded in cognitive load theory, dual-coding theory, and communicative language teaching (CLT) frameworks, the research examines how auditory learning modalities influence vocabulary acquisition, listening comprehension, pronunciation accuracy, and overall communicative proficiency. Employing a descriptive survey design with stratified proportionate sampling, the study administered a validated ten-item Likert-scale instrument to 181 engineering students (91 male, 90 female) drawn from three disciplines: Artificial Intelligence and Data Science (n = 62), Computer Science and Engineering (n = 63), and Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning (n = 56). Data were analysed using IBM SPSS v20.0 through Principal Component Analysis (PCA), Multiple Regression, and Chi-Square tests. PCA yielded four interpretable factors: Immersive Skill Development, Communicative Fluency, Knowledge Transmission, and Inclusive Learning. Multiple regression analysis identified development of four language skills (Beta = 0.381, p < 0.001) and catering to all learner levels (Beta = 0.223, p = 0.007) as statistically significant predictors of overall improvement in communication and knowledge. Chi-square analysis revealed a significant association between academic department affiliation and perceived improvement (p = 0.017). The findings affirm that audiobooks constitute a viable, scalable, and accessible supplementary pedagogical tool within the ELT classroom for engineering education.

Keywords: Audiobooks; English Language Teaching; Engineering Education; Language Acquisition; Audible; Post-Pandemic Learning; Listening Comprehension; Communicative Competence.

1. INTRODUCTION

The landscape of language education has undergone a seismic transformation in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. The enforced closure of physical institutions and the abrupt pivot to digital modalities exposed

longstanding vulnerabilities in traditional print, dependent pedagogies, compelling educators to reconceptualise literacy and language learning. In this context, audiobooks, long regarded as peripheral to mainstream English Language Teaching (ELT), have emerged as a central artefact of a broader 'listening renaissance' (Tattersall Wallin, 2021) that challenges the primacy of reading in language acquisition.

In India, the adoption of audiobooks accelerated markedly after 2010, driven by rapid smartphone penetration, high urban commute times, and the aspirational self-improvement culture particularly prevalent among technical students (Anderson, 2021). Engineering students, who must engage with dense disciplinary texts (le Roux, K., Ngoepe, M., Shaw, C., & Collier-Reed, B. I. (2022) authored predominantly by Anglophone scholars (Gunaratne, A. I., 2023), face particular challenges in developing the communicative competencies such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing, which required for academic and professional success. The global audiobook market, which recorded trade revenue of 8.3% of total book sales in 2020 compared to 1.96% in 2010, provides compelling evidence of a structural shift in reading behaviour (Anderson, 2021).

Amazon's Audible platform, the world's largest producer and retailer of audiobooks, has been instrumental in normalising audio-based reading (Nanda R. Jafarian, Anne-Wil Kramer, 2025), particularly among younger demographics. Its streaming-first model, curated content libraries, and integration with AI-enabled voice technologies have democratised access to literary and educational content in ways that printed texts cannot replicate in resource-constrained educational contexts (Marchetti & Valente, 2018; Pardo, F., Cánovas, Ó., & Clemente, F. J. G. 2025).

Despite this growth, systematic empirical investigations into the pedagogical impact of audiobook integration within engineering education in India remain sparse (A. Miranda-Cueva and M. Cabanillas-Carbonell, 2020; D. Al Akil, V. Ahmed and S. Saboor, 2020; Marchetti, E., Valente, A., 2016). The extant literature predominantly addresses school-level or general EFL learners in Western contexts, leaving a significant lacuna regarding the specific cognitive, affective, and communicative outcomes for tertiary-level technical students in South Asia. This study seeks to address that gap.

Specifically, this study examines the role of Audible-mediated audiobooks in developing language acquisition skills among engineering undergraduates, interrogates the statistical relationships between audiobook engagement and communicative proficiency, and situates its findings within contemporary theoretical frameworks of multimodal literacy, cognitive load, and autonomous language learning. The paper proceeds as follows: Section 2 presents a critical synthesis of the relevant literature; Section 3 details the research methodology; Section 4 presents the statistical analyses and findings; Section 5 discusses the implications of those findings; and Section 6 concludes with directions for future research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Historical Evolution of Audiobooks in Education

The genealogy of audio-based literacy extends to the late nineteenth century, when Thomas Edison's phonograph created the first technological infrastructure for recorded speech. The institutionalisation of audio-text relationships, however, occurred primarily through the 1930s initiative by the Library of Congress, which launched the 'Talking Books' programme to serve blind and visually impaired readers. This early initiative established the foundational premise that audio narration could serve as a legitimate conduit for literary and educational content—a premise that contemporary digital platforms have expanded exponentially (Adkins & Bushman, 2015).

The transition from analogue cassette-based formats to digital downloads fundamentally altered the economics and accessibility of audiobooks. Alter (2020) documents how the convergence of broadband internet, smartphone ubiquity, and subscription models transformed audiobooks from niche accessibility tools into mainstream consumer products. The COVID-19 pandemic catalysed a further inflection point: with brick-and-mortar bookstores shuttered and educational institutions closed, audiobooks experienced unprecedented adoption across demographic segments, including student populations (Anderson, 2021).

2.2 Audiobooks and Language Acquisition: Theoretical Grounding

The theoretical scaffolding for audiobook-mediated language learning draws from three principal frameworks. First, Mayer's (2001) Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning posits that learners process verbal and visual information through independent cognitive channels and that learning is optimised when both channels are engaged coherently. Audiobooks, particularly when paired with synchronised text (Reading-While-Listening, or RWL), activate both auditory and visual processing channels, potentially reducing cognitive load while enhancing retention (Milliner, 2019; Tragant Mestres et al., 2019).

Second, Krashen's (1982) Input Hypothesis provides a compelling rationale for audiobook use in language acquisition. The hypothesis posits that comprehensible input slightly above the learner's current proficiency level ($i + 1$) is the primary mechanism of language acquisition. Audiobooks narrated by skilled voice actors provide precisely this kind of enhanced, contextualised input, exposing learners to authentic prosodic patterns, collocations, and discourse structures that decontextualised grammar instruction cannot replicate (Ivone & Renandya, 2019).

Third, Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development framework illuminates how audiobooks function as a form of mediated learning: the narrator serves as a 'more knowledgeable other,' scaffolding comprehension through voice modulation, prosodic emphasis, and paralinguistic cues that render otherwise opaque textual meanings accessible (Larson, 2015).

2.3 The Narrator's Role and Audiobook Quality

A consistent theme in the audiobook literature concerns the centrality of the narrator to the learner's experience. Saarikallio (2021) established that the quality of narrative performance fundamentally mediates listener engagement, arguing that skilled human narration outperforms text-to-speech synthesis in creating immersive learning experiences. Larson (2015) demonstrated that narrators' tonal choices and voice modulation patterns substantially influence listeners' comprehension depth and emotional engagement with texts.

Tattersall Wallin (2021; 2022) extended this analysis by examining the integration of audiobooks into young adults' daily routines, finding that the portability and multitasking affordances of audiobooks—particularly on platforms like Audible—enabled incidental learning during commuting, exercise, and domestic activities. Ameri (2007) further classified audiobooks into four narrative typologies—fully voiced, partially voiced, multivoiced, and unvoiced—each carrying distinct implications for learner engagement and comprehension outcomes.

2.4 Audiobooks in EFL and ELT Contexts

The empirical literature on audiobook efficacy in second-language learning contexts is substantial, though methodologically heterogeneous. Mohamed (2018) demonstrated significant improvements in listening comprehension among Saudi EFL preparatory year students following structured audiobook interventions. Ranto Rozak et al. (2021) documented enhanced listening fluency through narrow listening practices employing similar news stories in audiobook format. Imawan and Ashadi (2019) reported that audiobooks supported independent reading among EFL students by removing the phonological decoding burden inherent in silent reading.

Importantly for the present study, Başaran and Köse (2013) established that incorporating authentic spoken texts into listening curricula significantly improved EFL learners' ability to assimilate spoken language accurately and comprehensively. Tusmagambet (2020) confirmed positive effects of audiobook integration on both reading fluency and intrinsic motivation among EFL learners, a finding with particular relevance for engineering student populations who may harbour dispositional resistance to extended reading.

However, despite this growing body of literature, systematic investigations into the specific mechanisms through which audiobooks benefit engineering students in technical higher education institutions in India remain largely absent. The present study addresses this gap by examining the statistical relationships between audiobook engagement patterns and self-reported communicative competency outcomes in a South Indian engineering college context.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The study adopts a cross-sectional descriptive survey design within a quantitative research paradigm. This design is appropriate for investigating the distribution of attitudes, perceptions, and self-reported behavioural outcomes across a defined population at a single point in time (Beech, 2000). The research is informed by a post-positivist epistemological stance that acknowledges the probabilistic nature of social measurement while maintaining commitment to systematic, replicable data collection procedures.

3.2 Research Objectives

The study pursues four primary objectives: (i) to identify the demographic characteristics of the respondent population; (ii) to measure self-reported levels of communicative competency development associated with audiobook use; (iii) to analyse statistical relationships between audiobook engagement dimensions and communicative outcomes; and (iv) to evaluate the differential effectiveness of audiobooks across demographic subgroups.

3.3 Hypotheses

H₀: There is no statistically significant relationship between audiobook usage dimensions (independent variables) and overall improvement in communicative competence and domain knowledge (dependent variable).

H₁: There is a statistically significant relationship between audiobook usage dimensions (independent variables) and overall improvement in communicative competence and domain knowledge (dependent variable).

3.4 Population and Sampling

The target population comprised undergraduate engineering students enrolled at Saranathan College of Engineering, Tiruchirappalli, Tamil Nadu, India. Employing stratified proportionate random sampling to ensure departmental representation, a final sample of 181 students was obtained: 62 students from the third-year B.E. in Artificial Intelligence and Data Science (AI&DS), 63 students from the pre-final year B.E. in Computer Science and Engineering (CSE), and 56 students from B.E. in Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning (AIML). The gender composition was 91 male (50.3%) and 90 female (49.7%), reflecting near parity.

3.5 Instrument Development and Administration

A structured, close-ended questionnaire comprising ten statements assessed on a five-point Likert scale (Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree) was propagated, with an additional global agreement item serving as the dependent variable. Demographic variables captured included gender, age group, year of study, departmental affiliation, and years of prior audiobook experience. The questionnaire was pilot-tested on a sub-sample of 20 students not included in the main study to assess clarity and internal consistency prior to full administration.

3.6 Data Analysis

Data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 20.0. Principal Component Analysis (PCA) with Varimax

Technology-Enhanced Audiobooks as Pedagogical Tools for Language Acquisition among South Indian Engineering Students

rotation and Kaiser Normalisation was employed to identify underlying factor structures in the questionnaire items. Multiple regression analysis was conducted to identify statistically significant predictors of the dependent variable. Chi-square tests of independence were performed to examine associations between demographic variables and the dependent variable. Statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$ for all inferential tests.

4. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Principal Component Analysis (PCA)

PCA with Varimax rotation was applied to the ten questionnaire items. The extraction method converged in nine iterations, yielding four components with eigenvalues greater than 1.0. Items loading above 0.60 were retained for each factor. The Rotated Component Matrix is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Rotated Component Matrix (Principal Component Analysis, Varimax Rotation)

Item	F1	F2	F3	F4
Practice Reading-While-Listening (RWL)	.635			
Develop all four language skills	.781			
Difficult to follow if distracted	.694			
Develop ability to speak English fluently		.673		
Give knowledge			.721	
Present ideas and concepts clearly			.679	
Enable correct pronunciation learning			.683	
Showcase fluent, informative reading			.764	
Caters to all levels of students				.633
Allow multitasking		—	—	—

Note. Loadings below 0.60 are suppressed for clarity. F1 = Immersive Skill Development; F2 = Communicative Fluency; F3 = Knowledge Transmission; F4 = Inclusive Learning.

Factor 1 (Immersive Skill Development) encompassed three items relating to simultaneous reading and listening, holistic language skill development, and attentional demands, with loadings ranging from .635 to .781. Factor 2 (Communicative Fluency) loaded on speaking fluency development (.673). Factor 3 (Knowledge Transmission) grouped four items concerning knowledge provision, conceptual clarity, pronunciation modelling, and reading fluency (.679–.764). Factor 4 (Inclusive Learning) loaded on the item addressing differentiated accessibility (.633).

4.2 Multiple Regression Analysis

Multiple regression was performed with the four factor-representative items as independent variables and the global agreement statement as the dependent variable. The Model Summary (Table 2) and ANOVA results (Table 3) confirm the statistical adequacy of the model.

Table 2: Multiple Regression Model Summary

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error of Estimate
1	.539 ^a	.290	.268	1.02941

^a Predictors: (Constant), Develop all four language skills, Develop ability to speak English fluently, Showcase fluent informative reading, Caters to all levels of students.

Table 3: ANOVA^b

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	55.518	4	13.880	13.098	.009
Residual	135.640	128	1.060		
Total	191.158	132			

^b Dependent Variable: Overall, I strongly agree with the improvement in communication and knowledge through audiobook usage.

The ANOVA confirms the overall regression model is statistically significant ($F(4, 128) = 13.098$, $p = 0.009$). The R^2 value of .290 indicates that 29.0% of variance in the dependent variable is explained by the independent predictors, with an adjusted R^2 of .268 reflecting a modest attenuation for model complexity.

Table 4: Regression Coefficients^b

Predictor	B	Std. Error	β (Beta)	t	Sig.
(Constant)	1.572	.328	—	4.794	.000

Predictor	B	Std. Error	β (Beta)	t	Sig.
Develop all four language skills	.335	.073	.381*	4.573	.000
Develop ability to speak fluently	.094	.084	.094	1.119	.265
Showcase fluent, informative reading	-.006	.082	-.006	-.079	.937
Caters to all levels of students	.196	.071	.223*	2.740	.007

* Significant at $p < 0.05$. ^b Dependent Variable: Overall improvement in communication and knowledge through audiobook usage.

Of the four predictors, two emerged as statistically significant: ‘Develop all four language skills’ ($\beta = 0.381$, $t = 4.573$, $p < 0.001$) and ‘Caters to all levels of students’ ($\beta = 0.223$, $t = 2.740$, $p = 0.007$). These findings support the alternative hypothesis H_1 , confirming a statistically significant relationship between audiobook-facilitated language skill development and perceived communicative improvement.

4.3 Chi-Square Analysis

Table 5: Chi-Square Tests — Association Between Demographic Variables and Perceived Improvement

S.No.	Demographic Variable	χ^2 Value	df	Sig. (p)
1	Gender	5.993	4	.200
2	Age Group	9.271	12	.680
3	Year of Study	—	—	—
4	Years of Audiobook Experience	10.227	12	.596
5	Departmental Affiliation	18.628	8	.017*

* Significant at $p < 0.05$.

Chi-square analysis revealed that of the five demographic variables examined, only departmental affiliation yielded a statistically significant association with perceived improvement in communication and knowledge ($\chi^2(8) = 18.628$, $p = 0.017$). Gender ($\chi^2(4) = 5.993$, $p = .200$), age group ($\chi^2(12) = 9.271$, $p = .680$), and prior audiobook experience ($\chi^2(12) = 10.227$, $p = .596$) showed no significant associations. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected for departmental affiliation only, suggesting that disciplinary context moderates audiobook effectiveness in ways that merit further investigation.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study converge with and extend the existing literature on audiobook-mediated language learning in several important ways. The emergence of ‘Develop all four language skills’ as the strongest predictor of overall communicative improvement ($\beta = 0.381$) reinforces Ivone and Renandya’s (2019) argument that extensive listening via audiobooks generates integrative gains across the LSRW skill spectrum, rather than being confined to auditory processing alone. The mechanism appears to be the holistic, contextualised nature of audiobook input, which exposes learners simultaneously to authentic phonological patterns, syntactic structures, and lexical co-occurrences that decontextualised grammar instruction fails to provide.

The significance of ‘Catering to all levels of students’ ($\beta = 0.223$) reflects the inclusive pedagogical potential of audiobooks, consistent with Tsumagambet’s (2020) finding that audio-based learning reduces affective barriers for students with lower reading proficiency or higher reading anxiety. For engineering students, many of whom are L2 English users who perceive academic reading as cognitively burdensome, audiobooks lower the activation threshold for engagement with complex technical and literary content.

The departmental variation in perceived outcomes is a theoretically productive finding. The significant chi-square result for departmental affiliation ($p = 0.017$) suggests that disciplinary culture, curriculum structure, and possibly the nature of technical vocabulary in AI&DS, CSE, and AIML programmes differentially mediate the benefits of audiobook engagement. CSE students, who are typically exposed to more Anglophone technical discourse through international research literature, may derive different linguistic benefits than AIML students encountering more applied, domain-specific content.

The absence of significant gender differences is noteworthy given that some prior studies have documented gendered patterns in reading motivation and digital media consumption. The gender parity in this sample (50.3% male, 49.7% female), combined with the non-significant chi-square result ($p = .200$), suggests that audiobooks may function as an equitable pedagogical instrument in the South Indian engineering college context, avoiding the motivational asymmetries sometimes observed in print-based reading interventions.

The moderate R^2 value (.290) warrants acknowledgement. While statistically significant and consistent with the inherent complexity of language acquisition processes, it indicates that 71% of variance in the outcome variable is attributable to factors not captured in this instrument—including learner autonomy, platform engagement time, content genre preferences, and instructor mediation. Future studies employing longitudinal designs and objective

linguistic assessment measures would provide more robust causal inferences.

The COVID-19 pandemic context deserves specific theoretical attention. The enforced shift to remote and hybrid learning created what might be termed a 'forced incubation' for digital literacy practices. Audiobooks became not merely supplementary tools but primary vehicles for literary and educational engagement during a period when physical library access was unavailable. The double-digit annual revenue growth in the audiobook sector since 2012, accelerated by pandemic-era adoption patterns, suggests that the pedagogical integration of audiobooks in engineering education is not merely a contingency response but a durable transformation of the learning landscape.

6. CONCLUSION

This study provides empirical evidence that technology-enhanced audiobooks, as accessed through the Audible platform, constitute a statistically significant and pedagogically viable tool for developing language acquisition competencies among engineering undergraduates in South India. The holistic language skill development and inclusive accessibility are the strongest predictors of perceived communicative improvement provide that the findings will pave ways to carry out practical implications for curriculum designers, ELT practitioners, and institutional policy-makers.

For practitioners, the findings recommend the systematic integration of curated audiobook libraries within Soft Skills and Communication laboratories in engineering colleges, with particular emphasis on platforms offering diverse content genres and adjustable narration speeds that can scaffold learners at different proficiency levels. The Reading-While-Listening modality, which loaded strongly on the Immersive Skill Development factor, deserves specific curricular attention as a dual-channel intervention that leverages the complementarity of auditory and visual processing.

At the institutional level, the significant departmental variation in outcomes suggests that one-size-fits-all audiobook programmes may require discipline-specific customisation—for instance, incorporating ESP (English for Specific Purposes) audiobook content aligned with each engineering discipline's technical discourse community. Investment in Audible for Education or equivalent institutional subscription models would democratise access beyond students who can afford individual subscriptions.

The study acknowledges several limitations. The single-institution sample constrains generalisability; replication across geographically and institutionally diverse engineering colleges in India is needed. The exclusive reliance on self-reported Likert-scale data, while appropriate for attitudinal measurement, should be complemented by pre-post linguistic assessments and qualitative interview data in future investigations. Additionally, the lack of a control group means causal claims must be appropriately tempered.

Future research directions include longitudinal investigations of audiobook-mediated vocabulary acquisition in ESP contexts, comparative studies of Audible versus free-access platforms (e.g., LibriVox, Project Gutenberg audio), investigation of the differential effects of narrative typologies (fully voiced versus multivoiced) on engineering student outcomes, and mixed-methods explorations of the qualitative dimensions of audiobook engagement in Indian higher education.

In summation, this study contends that the listening renaissance catalysed by digital audiobook platforms represents not a peripheral trend but a fundamental reorientation of language pedagogy for the digital age. Engineering institutions that embrace this reorientation stand to produce graduates with richer communicative repertoires, stronger autonomous learning habits, and greater readiness for the Anglophone professional environments they will navigate.

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