# Children's reading habits shift as audiobooks gain popularity



The National Literacy Trust (NLT) has recently revealed significant findings from its annual survey indicating a shift in children's reading habits in the UK. The survey, which involved over 37,000 participants aged between 8 to 18, shows that for the first time since it began monitoring these trends in 2020, a greater proportion of children now prefer listening to audiobooks and podcasts over reading traditional books for pleasure.

The poll reported that in 2024, 42.3% of respondents expressed enjoyment in listening to audio formats, an increase from 39.4% in 2023. In stark contrast, only 34.6% indicated they enjoyed reading in their free time, marking a decline from 43.4% the previous year and illustrating what the NLT described as a “crisis” in reading enjoyment among children. Boys appeared to be particularly disengaged, with only 28.2% claiming they liked reading for enjoyment, compared to 40.5% of girls, yet the trend showed that boys were now more inclined towards audio enjoyment with a participation rate of 43.4% versus 40.4% of girls.

Jonathan Douglas, chief executive of the NLT, highlighted the implications of these findings, stating, “In recent years, we’ve seen a steady rise in children’s enjoyment of listening to audio and uncovered the myriad of benefits it can bring – from sparking a love of reading and supporting literacy development to deepening learning and boosting wellbeing.” He voiced hope that audiobooks and podcasts could act as bridges to rekindling children's interest in books.

The survey also noted that nearly 37% of respondents felt that listening to audiobooks intrigued them about reading books, and almost half indicated that audio formats helped them understand stories better. Given these insights, the NLT is advocating for the inclusion of various reading formats, including audiobooks, in the government’s ongoing curriculum and assessment review.

The call for change comes amidst an apparent decline in traditional reading. The educational community has shown a mix of support and caution regarding this trend. Julie McCulloch, director of strategy and policy at the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL), expressed that while there is potential in employing audio formats to foster a love for reading, it should complement traditional teaching practices rather than replace them.

Conversely, concerns were raised by John Mullan, a professor of English at University College London, who argued that there is a distinct difference between reading and listening. He stated, “But it’s something very different from having your parents read a book to you... An audiobook is unresponsive and implacable... it does not mean it can’t be a portal to a love of books; of course, it can.”

Rachel de Souza, the children’s commissioner for England, partially concurred, emphasising the value of audiobooks while asserting that they should not replace the experience of reading print books, which offers a unique interaction between reader and text.

As the UK government prepares to release an interim report on educational reforms, the debate continues on the role of audiobooks in children's literacy development against the backdrop of diminishing interest in reading for pleasure. Meanwhile, educational leaders are calling for strategies that support and enhance children's literacy skills, ensuring they can successfully navigate the demands of modern life.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.lovereading4kids.co.uk/blog/childrens-reading-enjoyment-plummets-even-further-according-to-literacy-trusts-annual-survey-6752> - This article supports the claim that reading enjoyment among children has reached a historic low, with only 34.6% of children aged 8 to 18 enjoying reading in their free time in 2024. It also highlights the significant decline in reading enjoyment and frequency.
* <https://nlt.cdn.ngo/media/documents/Children_and_young_peoples_reading_in_2024_Report.pdf> - This report from the National Literacy Trust provides detailed data on the decline in reading enjoyment and frequency among children and young people in 2024. It emphasizes the gender gap and age-related trends in reading habits.
* <https://literacytrust.org.uk/research-services/research-reports/children-and-young-peoples-reading-in-2024/> - This webpage summarizes the key findings from the National Literacy Trust's survey, including the decline in reading enjoyment and the impact of socio-economic factors on reading habits.
* <https://www.noahwire.com> - This source provides an overview of the National Literacy Trust's findings on children's reading habits, including the preference for audiobooks and podcasts over traditional reading. However, it does not offer specific data or analysis beyond the initial article.
* <https://www.ascl.org.uk/> - The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) website could provide context on educational policies and strategies related to literacy development, though it does not directly address the specific claims about audiobooks and reading trends.
* <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/english/> - University College London's English department webpage might offer insights into academic perspectives on reading and literacy, including the views of professors like John Mullan, but it does not directly support the specific claims about children's reading habits.