

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This chapter presents the foundation of the study by outlining the key aspects that frame the research. It begins with the background of the study, which explains the significance of listening in second language acquisition and the rationale for integrating podcasts into EFL listening instruction. This is followed by the identification and formulation of research problems, which specify the issues to be addressed and the guiding research questions. The chapter then discusses the objectives of the study and the significance of the research, highlighting both theoretical and practical contributions. Finally, the scope and limitations of the study are provided to ensure clarity and focus. Together, these sections establish the context, purpose, and direction of the research.

#### **A. Background of the Study**

Senior high school learners are encouraged to strengthen their English proficiency in reading, listening, speaking, and writing skills, which are vital for both academic purposes and daily communication. However, because English is considered a foreign language and rarely practiced in their environment, mastering it often becomes difficult. As a result, the lessons students learn in school are forgotten and never remembered. Additionally, pupils' lack of enthusiasm for learning English has a big influence on how well they comprehend the language. This is because they don't think English is important enough. Thus, to acquaint students with English discourse, English classes are required.

The use of foreign languages is becoming increasingly common in Indonesia and is gaining more importance from educational institutions and other international initiatives (Wijana, 2018). This phenomenon is quite beneficial, as it can assist children in learning English in the classroom, in addition to taking classes or attending certain institutions. To entice students to join them, many universities provide their respective benefits. However, for people struggling financially, the expense of training may be a deterrent to taking a language course

and improving their English. However, taking a language course isn't the only way to learn English in the current digital era. Utilizing mobile learning applications available on platforms such as the Play Store or Apple Store provides an alternative approach for learners to improve their English proficiency.

Especially, listening comprehension is an important skill in language learning and plays a vital role in effective communication and overall language proficiency (Richards, 2008). However, it can be difficult for non-native speakers to develop this skill, especially those with little exposure to native speakers. In Indonesian senior high schools, many students still struggle with listening comprehension despite years of formal English instruction. The difficulties most commonly reported include limited vocabulary knowledge, inability to recognize spoken words at natural speed, and reliance on scripted textbook audio that does not reflect authentic speech patterns. These challenges are compounded by the lack of exposure to English outside the classroom, meaning that students rarely have opportunities to practice with natural and varied input. As a result, they often experience listening anxiety, fail to catch main ideas, and struggle to transfer classroom practice into real-life listening contexts. The main source of these problems can be traced to insufficient access to authentic, engaging, and level-appropriate listening materials. In addition, traditional language learning tools, such as textbooks and scripted audio recordings, often fail to provide a dynamic and authentic listening experience that bridges this gap. With advancements in digital technology, podcasts have emerged as a powerful tool to enhance English language learners' listening skills.

Brown (2001) stated that listening is a crucial element in language learning and teaching, since students tend to spend more time listening than speaking in the classroom. Listening helps students receive and process language input, which is essential for building vocabulary, understanding grammar, and enhancing their overall comprehension of a language. Since listening forms the basis for speaking, writing, and reading, it is central to language learning.

According to Brown (2004), language learning includes five types of listening: intensive, responsive, selective, extensive, and interactive. Intensive listening involves paying close attention to language details, such as sounds, words, intonation, and markers. Responsive listening is about understanding short exchanges, such as greetings or questions, and giving quick replies. Selective listening means finding specific information in a conversation or short speech, like a news report or a teacher's instructions. Extensive listening involves understanding the main ideas in longer talks, such as stories or news reports. Interactive listening happens in two-way talks, where the listener and speaker take turns communicating.

English listening comprehension poses significant challenges for non-native speakers, particularly those with limited exposure to native speech. Processing continuous streams of native speech often strains cognitive resources, which can hinder the resolution of misunderstandings. Consequently, non-native listeners may miss segments of speech and achieve only partial comprehension. Recent research has introduced various technologies to facilitate real-time comprehension, such as speech translation systems, real-time automatic speech recognition (ASR) transcripts, and artificial delays to extend processing time. Some studies further recommend integrating multiple support mechanisms, including automated transcripts and bilingual dictionaries, to enable users to select the most effective tools for their needs. In contrast, conventional language learning resources, such as textbooks and scripted audio, typically do not provide dynamic or authentic listening experiences.

To develop listening skills, advancements in digital technology, such as podcasts, have emerged as an innovative tool to improve the listening skills of English language learners. Historically, language learning resources have evolved from traditional textbooks to multimedia and interactive online tools. Recent advances in digital technology have introduced new learning resources, such as podcasts, reshaping the way listening comprehension can be developed. Podcasts combine authenticity with accessibility, making them valuable in a variety of

learning environments, especially for students who are less exposed to native speakers. The trend of using audio resources for language learning reflects a shift towards contextual learning, where learners engage with language in real-life situations.

Podcasts offer a unique and varied genre that makes them particularly effective at improving listening comprehension. They feature real conversations, natural speech patterns, and a variety of accents, helping students adapt to the nuances of spoken English. Additionally, the wide range of topics and contexts covered in podcasts allows learners to engage with language in everyday situations, academic discussions, cultural topics, and more, making listening comprehension more interesting and relevant.

Moreover, podcasts have recently gained popularity as a language learning tool, especially for improving listening comprehension. Given their depth and variety of genres and contexts, podcasts have the potential to offer learners language learning and aid in the development of listening skills. Therefore, this study specifically investigates how adapting podcasts to various contexts—such as everyday conversations, academic settings, or cultural themes—can influence the improvement of English listening skills among non-native learners. By focusing on the impact of contextualized audio resources, this research aims to clarify how such tools might bridge gaps in traditional listening practices and contribute to more effective language acquisition.

## **B. Identification of the Problems**

Despite the rapid development of digital tools in language education, many students still struggle to improve their listening skills in English. Traditional learning materials often rely on scripted audio and formal dialogues, which fail to reflect the authentic flow of real-life conversations. As a result, students may struggle to comprehend naturally spoken English, especially when it includes varied accents, informal expressions, or spontaneous speech patterns.

Although podcasts have emerged as a promising resource in recent years, their full potential remains underutilized in classroom settings, particularly in context-specific situations such as casual conversations, academic discussions, or cultural topics. Many students struggle to select podcast content that aligns with their learning objectives. Additionally, teachers may lack effective strategies for integrating podcasts into lesson plans.

Limited exposure to authentic English audio content outside the classroom restricts listening practice and diminishes learners' confidence and ability to accurately interpret spoken information. Although some studies suggest that podcasts can improve listening and pronunciation skills, further research is needed to determine how various podcast themes affect learners with different preferences and language objectives.

### **C. Research Scope**

This research sets clear boundaries to ensure the scope remains specific and manageable. The focus is solely on examining the influence of podcasts as the independent variable on students' listening comprehension, which is treated as the dependent variable. Other language skills, such as reading, speaking, and writing, are intentionally excluded from assessment, even though indirect impacts may occur.

The participant group consists exclusively of Grade XI students at SMK Muhammadiyah Kersamanah during the first semester of the 2024/2025 academic year. As a result, the findings are not intended to be generalized to other grade levels, schools, or educational contexts. The study utilizes a pre-experimental One-Group Pretest-Posttest design, which lacks a control group and therefore cannot fully account for extraneous variables such as history, maturation, and testing effects. The intervention is limited to four sessions, and the study does not assess the long-term retention of listening skills following the use of podcasts.

#### **D. Research Questions**

Based on the background and the limitations of the study, the research problems are formulated into the following questions:

1. What is the level of students' listening ability before receiving instruction through contextual podcasts?
2. What is the level of students' listening ability after receiving instruction through contextual podcasts?
3. To what extent is the improvement in students' listening ability following the implementation of contextual podcasts?

#### **E. The Purposes of the Study**

Based on the research questions, the purposes of the study are as follows:

1. To explain the condition of students' listening abilities prior to the use of contextual podcasts in teaching.
2. To assess the students' listening abilities after learning with contextual podcasts.
3. To determine whether there is a notable improvement in students' listening abilities after being taught through contextual podcasts.

#### **F. The Significance of the Study**

The results of this study are expected to provide practical benefits as follows:

##### **1. Teachers**

Teachers receive insights about how contextualized podcasts improve students' listening comprehension skills. They can determine which types of podcasts, academic, conversation, or cultural, are the most effective and entertaining, allowing them to create more suitable lessons.

##### **2. Students**

For learners of English as a second language, podcasts serve as an engaging and practical medium to enhance listening skills. Through this approach, students gain a clearer understanding of how various types of podcasts contribute to the development of their listening proficiency.

##### **3. Other Researchers**

The researcher can determine how non native English learners view the use of contextualized podcasts and which podcast themes are most beneficial for improving listening comprehension. Furthermore, this study contributes to the broader body of literature on the integration of digital resources in language learning, aiming to make the process more engaging and effective.

### **G. Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework of this research offers an organized foundation for guiding the study, outlining the progression from problem identification to proposed solutions and anticipated measurable outcomes. It systematically connects theoretical concepts from the literature review, including the nature of listening, student challenges, and characteristics of learning materials, to the specific research question. The framework is based on the premise that a targeted pedagogical intervention, grounded in established learning theory and delivered through an appropriate medium, can produce significant and measurable improvements in language proficiency.

### **H. Previous Study**

Existing research has generally shown positive results for podcasts in language learning, particularly in improving listening and pronunciation skills. A study by Khairiah, Syahabuddin, and Rizqa (2021) found that podcasts effectively improve students' listening skills, suggesting that regular exposure to native speaker models through these mediums improves comprehension and pronunciation. However, limited research exists on the impact of contextualized or theme-based podcasts, which provide language in certain real-life situations.

Podcasting allows educators to engage students using voice recordings, images, videos, and sound effects, extending beyond traditional assignments (Kenna, 2023). For instance, students may submit recorded science presentations, write and perform plays as writing assignments, or produce visual progress reports for ongoing projects. Podcasting is particularly effective for English language



learners because it provides access to authentic listening material on a wide range of topics (Beare, 2005; King & Gura, 2008).

Podcasts promote active listening by requiring learners to attend to context, tone, and vocabulary in authentic situations. However, limited research addresses the effectiveness of topic-specific, contextualized podcasts in language learning.

In addition, podcasting can accommodate a wide range of learning preferences and styles. Some students may benefit from listening to conversational podcasts that replicate informal spoken English, while others may prefer more structured content, such as interviews or academic debates. This variety addresses various language learning goals and ability levels, making podcasts a more accessible and adaptive resource (Hasan & Hoon, 2013). Teachers can also develop podcast episodes based on their class objectives, ensuring that the content is both pedagogically relevant and engaging for students.

Podcasts introduce listeners to cultural aspects of language use. Language is more than just grammar and vocabulary; it also involves comprehending cultural references, common expressions, humor, and social standards. Podcasts often represent authentic cultural situations, which aid learners in developing intercultural competence—a crucial aspect of effective communication (Byram, 1997). Students learn about how language works in its cultural context through real-world subjects and discussions, which improves their language understanding and sensitivity.

While earlier research has offered important perspectives, there is still a noticeable absence of studies that deliver strong quantitative and empirical validation of their effectiveness. This creates a demand for experimental approaches that can statistically assess the impact of podcast-based learning on students' listening comprehension outcomes. In response, the present study attempts to bridge this gap by examining how podcasts influence students' listening proficiency through a pre-experimental design. By utilizing pre-tests and post-tests, the study intends to generate quantitative findings that reveal whether



structured podcast exposure leads to a significant improvement in listening comprehension. The anticipated results are expected to provide empirical support for the usefulness of podcasts, offering educators evidence-based justification to adopt this tool in language instruction.

