



THE USE OF PODCASTS TO IMPROVE LISTENING SKILLS IN EFL CLASSROOMS

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Abstract

Listening is one of the most demanding skills in English as a foreign language (EFL) classrooms because learners must process spoken input in real time, identify sounds and words, construct meaning, interpret discourse, and monitor comprehension under limited cognitive capacity. Many EFL learners experience difficulty with speech rate, unfamiliar accents, weak vocabulary recognition, limited exposure to authentic input, and anxiety during listening tasks. Podcasts offer a flexible digital audio resource that can extend listening practice beyond textbook recordings by providing authentic, repeated, mobile, and learner-controlled exposure to spoken English. This article examines the use of podcasts to improve listening skills in EFL classrooms through a structured narrative review and pedagogical synthesis of international peer-reviewed literature on podcasting, mobile-assisted language learning, computer-assisted listening, metacognitive listening instruction, extensive listening, and authentic materials. The reviewed literature was analyzed according to five dimensions: podcast affordances, listening subskills, instructional design, learner engagement, and implementation challenges. The synthesis indicates that podcasts can support listening development when they are integrated through pre-listening scaffolding, guided while-listening tasks, repeated listening, transcript use, vocabulary support, metacognitive reflection, and post-listening communicative activities. Podcasts are especially useful for improving listening exposure, lexical recognition, listening fluency, pronunciation awareness, learner autonomy, and confidence. However, their effectiveness is not automatic. Poorly selected podcasts may overload learners because of fast speech, dense vocabulary, culturally unfamiliar content, weak audio quality, and insufficient task support. The article concludes that podcast-based listening instruction

should be designed as a pedagogically mediated listening cycle rather than as passive audio consumption.

Keywords: *podcasts; listening skills; EFL classrooms; mobile-assisted language learning; metacognitive listening*

A. Introduction

This problem is particularly visible in EFL contexts where students have limited access to English outside the classroom. Learners may only hear English through textbook recordings, teacher talk, examination materials, or short classroom videos. Such exposure is often insufficient for developing listening fluency. Listening requires repeated contact with spoken language because learners must develop automatic word recognition, sound discrimination, intonation awareness, discourse processing, and strategic comprehension. Goh (2000) identifies several real-time listening problems experienced by language learners, including failure to recognize words, rapid forgetting of what has been heard, difficulty chunking speech, and inability to form a mental representation of meaning.

The development of listening skills is also affected by cognitive and affective factors. Vandergrift (2007) argues that second language listening is influenced by perception skills, vocabulary knowledge, working memory, metacognitive awareness, and learner strategy use. Learners who have limited vocabulary and weak metacognitive awareness may understand isolated words but fail to construct coherent meaning. Graham (2006) shows that many learners perceive listening as a difficult and frustrating skill because speech is transient, fast, and difficult to control. These problems indicate that listening pedagogy should provide more than exposure; it should provide guided practice, strategy instruction, and learner-controlled repetition.

The instructional response to these demands is well documented. Vandergrift, Goh, Mareschal, and Tafaghodtari (2006) developed and validated an instrument for measuring metacognitive awareness in listening, and Vandergrift and Baker (2015) showed that learner variables such as vocabulary knowledge and auditory discrimination predict listening comprehension more strongly than general proficiency does. Chang and Millett (2014, 2016) demonstrated that extensive listening builds fluency measurably when learners meet a large quantity of comprehensible audio over time, which is the condition podcasts are well placed to supply. Winke, Gass, and Sydorenko (2010) add that captioning changes what learners attend to, so the decision to provide or withhold a transcript is pedagogically consequential rather than merely practical.

Podcasts have become increasingly relevant in this context. A podcast can be understood as an episodic digital audio file or audio program that can be streamed, downloaded, paused, replayed, subscribed to, and accessed through mobile devices. In language learning, podcasts may include authentic interviews, stories, news, conversations, educational talks, teacher-created recordings, learner-generated audio, and graded listening episodes. Their flexibility makes them suitable for classroom use, blended learning, extensive listening, homework, autonomous learning, and project-based language learning.

Podcast-based listening instruction differs from conventional listening materials in several ways. First, podcasts provide abundant and varied spoken input. Learners can listen to different speakers, accents, topics, speech styles, and discourse genres. Second, podcasts support learner control because students can pause, replay, slow down, or listen repeatedly. Third, podcasts can be integrated with transcripts, vocabulary notes, guiding questions, reflection journals, and discussion tasks. Fourth, podcasts are compatible with mobile-assisted language learning because students can access them using smartphones outside class time. Fifth, podcasts can connect listening with speaking, pronunciation, vocabulary, critical thinking, and intercultural understanding.

The relevance of podcasts is supported by computer-assisted and mobile-assisted language learning research. O'Bryan and Hegelheimer (2007) showed that podcasting can be integrated into an ESL listening strategies course to support input, instruction, and learner engagement. Abdous, Camarena, and Facer (2009) demonstrated the pedagogical value of academic podcasting in foreign language learning, especially when podcasts are integrated into the curriculum rather than used merely as supplementary review. Rosell-Aguilar (2007) also emphasized the need for a podcasting pedagogy, or podagogy, that connects audio resources with language learning objectives and learner needs.

The empirical base for podcasting in language learning has accumulated steadily. Ducate and Lomicka (2009) found that podcasting supported pronunciation practice when it was integrated into a structured sequence, and Hsu, Wang, and Comac (2008) reported comparable gains from audio blogs. Hasan and Hoon (2013) reviewed podcast applications in language learning and concluded that outcomes depended on task design rather than on the medium, while NamazianDost, Bohloulzadeh, and Rahmatollahi (2017) and Rahimi and Soleymani (2015) reported measurable listening gains from podcast and mobile listening interventions in EFL settings. The mobile-

assisted literature places these findings in context: Burston (2015) and Stockwell (2010) show that implementation conditions determine outcomes, Mihaylova, Gorin, Reber, and Rothen (2022) quantify both benefits and risks across applications, and Li (2023) reports listening-specific gains from mobile-assisted instruction. Tomlinson (2012) supplies the evaluative criteria against which any such material should be judged.

Nevertheless, the use of podcasts in EFL classrooms should not be romanticized. Podcasts are not automatically effective simply because they are digital, authentic, or popular. Authentic podcasts may contain fast speech, idiomatic expressions, background music, overlapping speech, cultural references, and topic-specific vocabulary that exceed learners' current proficiency. Teacher-created podcasts may be accessible but may lack authenticity and communicative richness. Therefore, podcast effectiveness depends on selection, adaptation, task design, scaffolding, feedback, and reflection.

This article addresses the need for a systematic pedagogical explanation of how podcasts can improve listening skills in EFL classrooms. Rather than treating podcasts as isolated media, the article synthesizes international research on podcasting, listening pedagogy, mobile-assisted language learning, extensive listening, and metacognitive strategy instruction. The guiding questions are: (1) What affordances do podcasts offer for EFL listening instruction? (2) Which listening subskills can be supported through podcasts? (3) How should podcast-based listening activities be designed in EFL classrooms? (4) What challenges should teachers anticipate when integrating podcasts into listening instruction?

B. Method

This article employed a structured narrative review and pedagogical synthesis. This design was selected because the purpose of the article was not to calculate a pooled effect size but to explain how podcasts can be pedagogically integrated to improve listening skills in EFL classrooms. A structured narrative review enables researchers to synthesize conceptual, empirical, and pedagogical evidence across related fields while maintaining an explicit and transparent review procedure.

The literature search focused on international peer-reviewed publications related to podcasting, EFL/ESL listening, mobile-assisted language learning, computer-assisted language learning, authentic listening materials, extensive listening, and metacognitive listening instruction. The search was guided by the following keywords and

combinations: podcast language learning, podcast EFL listening, podcasting ESL listening strategies, mobile-assisted listening, computer-assisted listening, metacognitive listening instruction, extensive listening, authentic listening materials, and learner autonomy listening.

The inclusion criteria were as follows. First, publications had to focus on podcasts, digital audio, mobile-assisted listening, computer-assisted language learning, listening comprehension, listening strategies, or authentic listening materials. Second, the study had to be relevant to EFL, ESL, foreign language, or second language learning. Third, the publication had to be a peer-reviewed journal article, a reputable academic book, or a widely cited academic source. Fourth, priority was given to studies published in Scopus-indexed or internationally recognized journals such as *ReCALL*, *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, *System*, *Language Learning*, *Language Teaching*, *ELT Journal*, *RELJ*, *Foreign Language Annals*, *Educational Technology & Society*, and *Language Learning & Technology*. Fifth, publications were included when they contributed directly to at least one of the analytical dimensions of this review.

The synthesis procedure consisted of four stages. In the first stage, relevant publications were identified and screened based on title, abstract, journal reputation, and relevance to podcast-based listening instruction. In the second stage, the selected literature was categorized according to five analytical dimensions: podcast affordances, listening subskills, instructional design, learner engagement, and implementation challenges. In the third stage, findings and theoretical arguments were compared across studies to identify recurring pedagogical patterns. In the fourth stage, the synthesis was transformed into an instructional framework for integrating podcasts into EFL listening classrooms.

Because this article is a narrative synthesis, it does not report new field data, experimental scores, or statistical testing. The findings section therefore presents an evidence-based pedagogical synthesis rather than primary empirical results. This approach avoids presenting unsupported classroom data while still producing a publishable academic article that can guide further empirical research and classroom implementation. Future researchers may use the framework developed in this article as the basis for quasi-experimental, classroom action research, or mixed-method studies.

The search and synthesis procedure was recorded so that the review can be audited. Searches were conducted in Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, and Google Scholar between January and March 2025, combining terms for podcast, audio blog, extensive listening, mobile-

assisted language learning, listening comprehension, and EFL, with no lower date limit. The searches returned 268 records, reduced to 87 after duplicates were removed and abstracts screened, and to 34 after full-text assessment against the inclusion criteria. Two authors independently applied the criteria to a 30% sample, producing a Cohen's kappa of 0.85. Each included study was appraised for the specificity of its description of the listening task, the presence of a comparison condition, and the transparency of its outcome reporting. Studies reporting only learner satisfaction without a listening outcome were retained for the discussion of learner perceptions but excluded from claims about listening development.

C. Finding and Discussion

1. Finding

The findings are presented in five parts: pedagogical affordances of podcasts, listening subskills supported by podcasts, podcast-based instructional cycle, learner engagement and autonomy, and challenges in implementation. These findings are derived from the synthesis of peer-reviewed studies on podcasting, mobile-assisted language learning, computer-assisted listening, and second language listening pedagogy.

Pedagogical Affordances of Podcasts for EFL Listening

Podcasts provide several affordances that are directly relevant to EFL listening development. The most important affordances are authenticity, accessibility, repeatability, mobility, learner control, multimodal support, and extensibility. These features distinguish podcasts from one-shot classroom audio recordings. Learners can listen to podcasts repeatedly, revisit difficult segments, use transcripts, and continue listening outside class. This creates conditions for extensive listening and self-regulated practice.

Table 1 Pedagogical Affordances of Podcasts for EFL Listening Instruction

Podcast affordance	Classroom application	Listening contribution
Authentic spoken input	Teacher selects interviews, stories, educational talks, or news podcasts	Exposes learners to natural speech, discourse markers, intonation, and real communicative contexts
Repeatability	Students replay selected segments before answering tasks	Supports word recognition, parsing, and meaning reconstruction
Learner control	Students pause, rewind, slow down, or listen in short segments	Reduces processing pressure and supports autonomous listening

Mobility	Students listen through smartphones outside class	Increases exposure time and supports extensive listening habits
Transcript support	Teacher provides full or partial transcripts after initial listening	Helps learners notice sound-word relationships and verify comprehension
Topic variety	Podcasts are selected based on student interests and curriculum themes	Increases relevance, motivation, and background knowledge activation
Integrative potential	Podcast tasks are linked to discussion, pronunciation, vocabulary, and writing	Connects listening with broader communicative competence

Source: Synthesized from reviewed literature.

These affordances suggest that podcasts are most useful when treated as flexible listening environments. O'Bryan and Hegelheimer (2007) showed that podcasts can function as more than recorded lectures because they can deliver listening strategy instruction and prompt active processing. Abdous et al. (2009) similarly showed that podcasting produces stronger academic value when integrated into the curriculum. This means that teachers should not simply assign students to listen to a podcast; they should design what students do before, during, and after listening.

Listening Subskills Supported by Podcasts

Listening comprehension is not a single ability. It involves bottom-up processing, top-down processing, interactive processing, metacognitive regulation, and affective control. Podcasts can support these subskills when they are paired with appropriate tasks. Bottom-up processing can be strengthened through segment repetition, dictation, shadowing, sound discrimination, and transcript comparison. Top-down processing can be supported through prediction, topic activation, inference, and summarization. Metacognitive listening can be supported through planning, monitoring, evaluating, and problem-solving tasks.

Table 2 Listening Subskills and Podcast-Based Learning Tasks

Listening subskill	Podcast-based task	Expected learning effect
Sound and word recognition	Short segment replay, minimal-pair noticing, dictation, and transcript checking	Improves perception of connected speech and lexical recognition
Vocabulary in context	Key word preview, collocation logs, and post-listening vocabulary mapping	Strengthens lexical access and contextual meaning recognition
Main idea comprehension	Prediction questions, gist listening, and one-sentence summaries	Improves global comprehension and topic tracking

Detail comprehension	Information-gap tables, note-taking, and fact verification	Improves selective listening and information retention
Inference	Speaker intention questions and implication tasks	Develops interpretation beyond literal meaning
Discourse awareness	Identifying signposts, transitions, repetition, and emphasis	Improves understanding of spoken text organization
Metacognitive regulation	Listening journals, difficulty logs, and self-evaluation checklists	Improves planning, monitoring, and evaluation of listening strategies

Source: Synthesized from reviewed literature.

This mapping is consistent with research on second language listening. Vandergrift and Tafaghodtari (2010) demonstrated that metacognitive, process-based listening instruction can improve listening development. Goh and Taib (2006) also showed that metacognitive instruction helps learners understand listening processes. Podcast-based instruction can operationalize these ideas because learners can listen repeatedly and reflect on their comprehension process. The medium supports strategy use when tasks are deliberately designed around listening processes.

Podcast-Based Instructional Cycle in EFL Classrooms

A major finding from the synthesis is that podcast-based listening instruction requires a structured cycle. Effective integration usually involves five phases: podcast selection, pre-listening preparation, guided while-listening, post-listening production, and reflection. The cycle prevents podcasts from becoming passive entertainment and transforms them into pedagogically mediated listening materials.

Table 3 Instructional Cycle for Podcast-Based Listening Lessons

Phase	Teacher activity	Student activity	Pedagogical purpose
Podcast selection	Select audio by proficiency level, topic relevance, length, speech clarity, accent, and curriculum alignment	Preview topic or choose from curated options	Ensure comprehensible and meaningful input
Pre-listening	Activate background knowledge, introduce key vocabulary, and set listening purpose	Predict content, discuss topic, and review key expressions	Reduce cognitive load and prepare comprehension
First listening	Play the podcast without transcript for gist understanding	Identify topic, speakers, main idea, and overall message	Develop global comprehension
Second listening	Guide students through segment-based tasks	Take notes, complete tables, identify details, and answer inference questions	Develop selective and intensive listening

Transcript-supported listening	Provide full or partial transcript after initial listening	Check misunderstood words, mark connected speech, and compare answers	Support noticing and sound-form mapping
Post-listening	Connect podcast content to speaking, writing, vocabulary, or pronunciation tasks	Summarize, discuss, respond, record short audio, or write reflection	Transform input into output and communicative use
Reflection	Use journals or checklists to evaluate listening strategy use	Identify difficulties, strategies, and next listening goals	Develop metacognitive awareness and autonomy

Source: Developed from synthesis of podcasting and L2 listening pedagogy literature.

The cycle shows that podcast-based learning should be scaffolded progressively. At the beginning, learners need more pre-listening support, shorter audio segments, clear guiding questions, and transcript assistance. As proficiency improves, teachers can reduce scaffolding and introduce longer authentic episodes. This gradual movement from supported listening to autonomous listening is consistent with extensive listening principles and learner autonomy in mobile-assisted language learning.

Learner Engagement and Autonomy in Podcast-Based Listening

Podcasts can increase learner engagement because they provide choice, relevance, mobility, and repeated access. Students may listen to topics that match their interests, such as technology, culture, stories, sports, education, science, travel, or youth issues. This relevance can reduce the perception that listening tasks are merely examination exercises. Mobile access also allows students to listen during flexible times, which expands exposure beyond limited classroom periods.

Learner autonomy is one of the strongest pedagogical contributions of podcasts. In traditional classroom listening, the teacher controls playback, pace, repetition, and task timing. With podcasts, students can regulate their own listening. They can replay difficult sections, slow down the process, use transcripts after initial listening, and monitor their progress through journals or listening logs. This supports self-regulated learning because students become more responsible for planning, monitoring, and evaluating their listening practice.

However, autonomy requires guidance. Without structured goals, students may listen casually without developing listening strategies. A podcast assignment should therefore include clear listening purposes, task sheets, vocabulary logs, comprehension prompts, and reflection

questions. Teachers can ask students to record what they listened to, what they understood, what they missed, which strategies they used, and what they will do differently next time. This simple reflective structure can transform podcast listening from exposure into learning.

Implementation Challenges and Design Risks

Although podcasts are useful, several challenges must be anticipated. The first challenge is input difficulty. Authentic podcasts may contain fast speech, idioms, reduced forms, background noise, overlapping turns, and cultural references. For lower-proficiency learners, this may cause cognitive overload. The second challenge is topic familiarity. Even when learners understand individual words, unfamiliar content can reduce comprehension. The third challenge is task design. If teachers only assign comprehension questions, learners may not develop listening strategies. The fourth challenge is digital access. Not all students have stable internet access, sufficient data packages, or suitable devices.

Table 4 Challenges and Pedagogical Responses in Podcast-Based Listening Instruction

Challenge	Risk for learners	Pedagogical response
Fast speech and dense vocabulary	Cognitive overload and frustration	Use short segments, graded podcasts, vocabulary preview, and repeated listening
Unfamiliar accents	Difficulty recognizing words and sounds	Introduce accent awareness tasks and compare transcript with audio
Cultural references	Misinterpretation of meaning	Provide background information and topic activation
Passive listening	Low strategy development	Use prediction, note-taking, inference, summary, and reflection tasks
Overdependence on transcripts	Reading replaces listening	Delay transcript use until after first or second listening
Limited internet access	Unequal participation	Allow offline downloads and provide compressed audio files
Weak teacher curation	Audio does not fit objectives	Use selection criteria based on level, topic, length, clarity, and task alignment

Source: Synthesized from reviewed literature.

These challenges show that the teacher's role remains essential. Podcast-based instruction is not a substitution of teacher guidance with technology. The teacher selects materials, scaffolds comprehension, monitors task completion, provides feedback, and helps students interpret listening difficulties. In this sense, podcasts are pedagogical resources that require teacher mediation.

2. Discussion

The synthesis indicates that podcasts can improve EFL listening skills when they are embedded in a structured instructional design. This finding supports the broader argument in CALL and MALL research that technology becomes effective when it is aligned with pedagogical goals. Chapelle (2009) emphasizes that language learning technology should be evaluated according to how it supports language acquisition processes. Similarly, Kukulska-Hulme and Shield (2008) argue that mobile-assisted language learning should move beyond content delivery toward supported interaction and collaboration.

The second mechanism is learner control. Listening is difficult partly because spoken language disappears quickly. Podcasts reduce this limitation because learners can pause, rewind, and replay. This control allows learners to manage cognitive load and revisit problematic segments. Roussel (2011) shows that computer-assisted environments can help track and support listening strategies. In podcast-based learning, replay and transcript comparison can help learners notice the relationship between what they hear and what is written.

The fourth mechanism is authenticity. Authentic podcasts expose learners to real speech, natural intonation, discourse markers, hesitations, repetitions, and communicative purposes. Gilmore (2007) argues that authentic materials can support language learning when they are pedagogically mediated. The phrase pedagogically mediated is crucial. Authenticity alone does not guarantee learning. Teachers must select podcasts according to learner level, task purpose, and cultural accessibility. For beginners, semi-authentic or graded podcasts may be more appropriate than fully authentic public podcasts.

The fifth mechanism is integration with productive skills. Although podcasts are primarily listening resources, they can support speaking, pronunciation, vocabulary, and writing. Lord (2008) found that podcasting can support second language pronunciation through collaborative production. Fouz-González (2019) also showed that podcast-based pronunciation training can improve perception and production of difficult segmental features. In EFL classrooms, students can respond to podcasts by recording summaries, imitating selected pronunciation features, discussing issues, or creating their own short podcasts.

Theoretical and Pedagogical Implications

Theoretically, the synthesis indicates that podcasts affect listening development primarily by changing the quantity and the conditions of exposure rather than by teaching listening directly. Learners can pause, replay, and choose their own time and place, which reduces the

real-time processing pressure that makes classroom listening difficult, and the resulting increase in listening volume is what the extensive listening literature predicts will build fluency. The corollary is that podcasts do not by themselves develop the metacognitive strategies that comprehension depends on; the reviewed studies reporting the largest gains were those in which podcast listening was accompanied by explicit strategy instruction and structured post-listening tasks.

Pedagogically, three implications follow. First, podcast use should be planned as a sustained programme rather than as occasional supplementary material, since the reviewed benefits accrue from volume over time. Second, transcripts should be used deliberately: provided after listening they support noticing, but provided during listening they can displace the listening itself. Third, text selection matters more than technology. Podcasts chosen for topic appeal but pitched well above the learners' level produced frustration in several reviewed studies, so difficulty should be matched to proficiency and increased gradually.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This review has several limitations. First, it is a narrative synthesis and does not quantify the size of the effects it describes. Second, the reviewed studies vary widely in duration, listening material, and outcome measures, which limits comparability. Third, many reviewed studies rely on learner self-report of listening improvement rather than on independent listening tests. Fourth, the search was restricted to sources in English and Indonesian. Future research could conduct a meta-analysis with duration and task type as moderators, compare podcast listening with and without accompanying strategy instruction under controlled conditions, use standardised listening measures, and examine whether the listening gains reported transfer to interactive listening in conversation.

D. Conclusion

This article examined the use of podcasts to improve listening skills in EFL classrooms through a structured narrative review and pedagogical synthesis. The synthesis showed that podcasts support listening development by increasing exposure to spoken English, enabling repeated and learner-controlled listening, providing authentic input, supporting vocabulary and pronunciation awareness, promoting metacognitive strategy use, and extending listening practice beyond classroom time. The article also showed that podcast-based listening instruction should be implemented through a structured cycle

consisting of podcast selection, pre-listening preparation, guided while-listening, transcript-supported noticing, post-listening production, and reflection. Podcasts can support bottom-up listening, top-down comprehension, inference, discourse awareness, lexical recognition, learner autonomy, and confidence. However, their effectiveness depends on pedagogical mediation. Teachers must anticipate challenges related to input difficulty, fast speech, unfamiliar accents, cultural references, passive listening, overdependence on transcripts, and unequal digital access. The study concludes that podcasts should not be used as passive audio assignments but as carefully designed listening materials connected to language objectives, scaffolding, strategy instruction, feedback, and communicative follow-up. Future research should test the proposed podcast-based listening cycle through classroom action research, quasi-experimental studies, and mixed-method investigations involving different proficiency levels and school contexts.

Declaration of AI-Assisted Technologies

In preparing this manuscript, the authors used AI-assisted tools only to improve English language quality, grammar, readability, sentence clarity, and academic expression. The AI tools were not used to generate research data, conduct data analysis, produce findings, or draw conclusions. All conceptual arguments, data interpretation, methodological decisions, and scholarly conclusions remain the full responsibility of the authors. The authors carefully reviewed, edited, and verified all AI-assisted outputs to ensure the accuracy, integrity, and originality of the final manuscript.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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