

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Listening comprehension is one of the most important language skills in English learning because it becomes the first channel through which students receive spoken information. In English classes, students are expected not only to hear English sounds but also to identify words, understand meaning, interpret messages, and respond appropriately (Partiwi, 2022). When students have weak listening comprehension, they may also experience problems in speaking, vocabulary development, pronunciation, and classroom participation. For junior high school students, listening is especially important because it helps them become familiar with English sounds, common expressions, sentence patterns, and authentic pronunciation that may not appear clearly in written materials.

Although listening has an important role, it is often considered one of the most difficult skills for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. Many students can read English words in a textbook but still have difficulty understanding the same words when they are spoken by different speakers. The difficulty may occur because spoken English contains speed, stress, intonation, accent variation, connected speech, and unfamiliar vocabulary. Students may also lose concentration when the audio is long, unclear, or not related to their interests. In many classrooms, listening activities are still limited to teacher listening, textbook audio, or repeated exercises that do not always provide enough exposure to real communication.

The problem becomes more serious when students have limited opportunities to listen to English outside the classroom. In an EFL context such as Indonesia, English is not commonly used in students' daily communication. As a result, the classroom becomes the main place where students can practice listening. However, classroom time is limited, and teachers may not always have adequate media to provide varied listening input. Students at the junior high school level need listening materials that are

understandable, interesting, repeatable, and flexible. Without suitable learning media, students may become passive listeners who only answer questions without developing deeper comprehension strategies.

Digital technology offers new opportunities for improving listening instruction. One of the digital media that can be used in English classes is the podcast. A podcast is an audio-based digital material that can be streamed or downloaded and listened to repeatedly through smartphones, computers, or other devices. In language learning, podcasts can provide authentic or semi-authentic English input through dialogues, stories, interviews, monologues, and educational talks. Podcasts are flexible because students can listen to them inside or outside the classroom. They are also reusable because students can pause, replay, and review the same audio material when they do not understand the content at first listening.

Recent studies show that podcasts can support listening comprehension by increasing exposure to spoken English and by giving students access to varied topics and speakers. Nisa, Izzah, and Hadi (2022) reported that podcast use improved students' listening comprehension in a quantitative quasi-experimental study. Partiwi (2022) also found that students perceived podcasts as accessible and helpful for listening activities. Delgadillo and Illera (2024) showed that podcasts can improve post-test performance, motivation, vocabulary acquisition, and learner autonomy. In addition, Ningrum and Panggabean (2025) concluded in a systematic review that podcasts provide authentic listening materials, flexible access, and opportunities for metacognitive listening practice.

The use of podcasts is relevant to the current needs of English learning because students are increasingly familiar with digital media. Many students already use smartphones and audio platforms for entertainment. This habit can be redirected into learning activities. When podcasts are selected according to students' proficiency level and curriculum needs, they can become meaningful learning resources. Students can listen to short podcast episodes before class, discuss the main ideas during class, and answer comprehension questions after listening. This process encourages students to

become active listeners because they must predict, identify information, infer meaning, and evaluate what they hear.

In listening theory, comprehension does not occur only by hearing sounds. Students process spoken input through bottom-up and top-down processes. Bottom-up processing helps students recognize sounds, words, phrases, and grammatical patterns (Qasserras, 2025). Top-down processing helps students use background knowledge, context, topic familiarity, and prediction to understand meaning. Podcast-based learning can support both processes. For example, students can practice bottom-up skills by identifying keywords, pronunciation, and details from the podcast. At the same time, they can practice top-down skills by predicting the topic, connecting it with prior knowledge, and summarizing the speaker's message. Therefore, podcasts are not merely entertainment media but can be organized as learning media that train listening comprehension systematically.

The school context also supports the need for this research. SMPN Pangarengan 1 Sampang is selected because the students are expected to improve their English listening comprehension, while listening practice still needs more interesting and flexible media. Some students may face difficulties in understanding English audio because of limited vocabulary, unfamiliar accents, low motivation, and lack of exposure to authentic spoken English. These conditions are directly related to the focus of this study. If podcasts are used as learning media, students may receive more varied listening input and may become more motivated to practice English listening.

The reason for choosing the title 'The Effectiveness of Using Podcasts to Improve Students' Listening Comprehension in English Classes' is based on three considerations. First, listening comprehension is a real problem in English learning and needs practical solutions. Second, podcasts are accessible digital media that can provide repeated, authentic, and interesting listening input. Third, the effectiveness of podcasts needs to be measured empirically through students' listening scores, not only described through opinion. Therefore, this study is designed to examine whether the

use of podcasts is effective in improving students' listening comprehension in English classes.

Based on the explanation above, this research is important because it connects classroom listening problems with a digital learning medium that is relevant to students' learning habits. The study is expected to provide evidence for English teachers about whether podcasts can be used as an alternative medium to improve listening comprehension. It also contributes to the development of listening instruction by showing how podcast-based activities can be integrated into English classes through pre-listening, while-listening, and post-listening activities.

1.2 Research Problem

Based on the background of the study, the research problem is formulated as:
Does the use of podcasts significantly improve students' listening comprehension in English classes?

1.3 Research Objective

The objective of this study is to find out whether the use of podcasts is effective in improving students' listening comprehension in English classes.

1.4 Significance of the Study

The result of this study is expected to give both theoretical and practical contributions.

1.4.1 Theoretical Significance

Theoretically, this study is expected to enrich the discussion of podcast-based listening instruction in EFL classrooms. It supports the view that listening comprehension can be improved through meaningful and repeated exposure to spoken English. It also contributes to the application of bottom-up and top-down listening processes in digital media-based learning.

1.4.2 Practical Significance

Practically, this research may benefit English teachers, students, the school, and future researchers. For English teachers, the study can provide an alternative medium for teaching listening. For students, podcasts may help them practice

listening more independently and enjoyably. For SMPN Pangarengan 1 Sampang, the study may support the improvement of English learning quality. For future researchers, this study can become a reference for further research on digital audio media and listening comprehension.

1.5 Scope and Limitation

This study focuses on the effectiveness of using podcasts to improve students' listening comprehension in English classes. The study is limited to selected students at SMPN Pangarengan 1 Sampang. The listening materials are limited to selected English podcasts that match the students' level, curriculum needs, and learning objectives. The effectiveness is measured mainly through students' pre-test and post-test listening comprehension scores.

1.6 Definition of Key Terms

1.6.1 Podcast

A podcast is a digital audio material that can be streamed or downloaded and listened to on demand. In this study, podcasts refer to selected English audio materials used as learning media to support listening comprehension activities in English classes.

1.6.2 Listening Comprehension

Listening comprehension refers to students' ability to understand spoken English, including identifying main ideas, specific details, vocabulary, speaker intention, and implicit meaning from audio input.

1.6.3 Effectiveness

Effectiveness refers to the extent to which podcast-based learning improves students' listening comprehension. In this study, it is indicated by the difference between pre-test and post-test scores and the comparison between experimental and control groups.

1.6.4 SMPN Pangarengan 1 Sampang

SMPN Pangarengan 1 Sampang is the research location selected for this study. The school is located in Pangarengan, Sampang, East Java. The school is chosen

because the students need more exposure to English listening materials and because podcast-based learning can be implemented in the English classroom context.