

Trend in Using Podcasts for Students Listening Skills: Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract

Objective: This research aimed to investigate the growing implementation of podcasts to enhance students' listening comprehension in higher education. **Theoretical framework:** Limited exposure to authentic spoken English and low student motivation remain persistent challenges in listening instruction, particularly in the digital learning era. **Literature review:** To address this issue, a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) was conducted using the PRISMA framework to synthesize current empirical evidence and map research trends from 2020 to 2024. Twenty-six relevant journal articles indexed in reputable academic databases were selected based on predetermined inclusion criteria. **Methods:** This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to examine and synthesize previous studies. **Results:** The findings reveal a strong upward trend in podcast-based listening research, peaking in 2023, with quantitative designs dominating 53.8% of studies. The results confirm that podcasts significantly improve listening performance and motivate learners due to their flexible, on-demand nature. Three pedagogical strategies were consistently effective: extensive listening, metacognitive integration, and collaborative podcast production. **Implications:** The study concludes that podcast-mediated learning is a powerful and innovative approach, yet further structural development, such as local content adaptation and technological training, is needed to optimize its implementation in higher education. **Novelty:** The novelty of this study lies in its PRISMA-based systematic mapping (2020-2024) that synthesizes evidence on podcast effectiveness in listening comprehension while uniquely identifying three consistently effective pedagogical strategies and highlighting the need for local content adaptation and technological training in higher education.

Keywords: podcast-based learning, listening comprehension, english as a foreign language (efl), higher education, systematic literature review (slr).

INTRODUCTION

Listening plays an essential role in English learning because it contributes directly to learners' communication skills in academic and real-life contexts. It is a complex cognitive process that involves interpreting phonological features, vocabulary, and socio-cultural information [1]. In Indonesia, students still face difficulties in developing listening comprehension due to limited access to authentic spoken English [2]. This condition is

further reinforced by a lack of engaging learning media that can enhance motivation and exposure to real language use [3].

The incorporation of cutting-edge instruments in language instruction has been prompted by the quick development of digital learning. According to Kalsum et al, podcasts have acquired recognition as a versatile and easily available resource that allows students to frequently listen to genuine speech at any time and from any location [4]. Furthermore, the use of such electronic media is closely linked to positive student perceptions; as noted by [4], students increasingly recognize the vital role of digital platforms in creating a more immersive and effective English learning environment. Because they are on-demand, students may select the subjects and listening speed that best fit their requirements, making the learning process more dynamic and independent [5].

According to research, podcast-based education boosts learning motivation and improves listening comprehension. Because they are on-demand, students may select the subjects and listening speed that best fit their requirements, making the learning process more dynamic and independent. According to research, podcast-based education boosts learning motivation and improves listening comprehension. This study uses the theoretical framework of top-down and bottom-up processing, which contends that language cues and contextual knowledge must be integrated for optimal listening comprehension. Successful listening development also requires the use of student-centered methods and realistic materials. By offering genuine input and promoting independent metacognitive participation while listening, podcasts are consistent with these paradigms [6].

Although several studies have demonstrated the advantages of podcast-based listening teaching, the majority of current research does not particularly look at listening improvement in higher education; instead, it concentrates on lower educational levels or more general language skills. As a result, there is still a significant gap in understanding current trends and figuring out the best ways to include podcasts in university listening instruction. The objective of this study is to chart the evolution of research in this area and examine the effects of podcasts on the listening skills of learners by methodically reviewing empirical evidence from 2020 to 2024 [7]. This research's state-of-the-art is its organized synthesis of instructional strategies that greatly improve listening skills via podcasts. According to the hypothesis put out, podcasts have a favorable impact on students' enthusiasm to learn in higher education settings and significantly improve their listening skills. Therefore, this study seeks to answer the following research questions: (1) How do podcasts influence students' motivation to learn in higher education contexts? and (2) To what extent do podcast-based instructional strategies improve students' listening skills?.

Implications and Novelty. The findings of this systematic literature review carry several important theoretical, pedagogical, and practical implications for English language teaching in higher education, particularly in EFL contexts such as Indonesia. First, from a pedagogical perspective, the consistent evidence of improved listening comprehension through podcast-based learning suggests that podcasts should no longer be treated as supplementary materials, but rather as integral components of listening instruction. Lecturers are encouraged to design structured podcast-based activities that go beyond passive listening, such as guided listening tasks, reflective listening journals, and follow-up discussions that foster critical thinking and deeper comprehension. The integration of extensive listening, metacognitive strategies, and collaborative podcast production can help learners develop autonomy, self-regulation, and confidence in processing authentic spoken English [8].

Second, the findings imply that podcast use aligns well with contemporary student-centered and technology-enhanced learning paradigms. Podcasts allow learners to control pace, repetition, and topic selection, which accommodates diverse proficiency levels and learning styles. This flexibility is particularly beneficial in higher education settings, where students are expected to take greater responsibility for their own learning. As a result, institutions should consider providing training for lecturers on digital pedagogy and podcast

integration, as well as improving technological infrastructure to support sustainable implementation [9].

From an institutional and policy perspective, the study highlights the importance of contextualizing podcast content. While many studies report positive outcomes, the effectiveness of podcasts can be maximized when materials are adapted to local cultural, academic, and linguistic contexts. Universities are therefore encouraged to promote the development of locally produced podcasts that reflect students' academic disciplines, sociocultural backgrounds, and real communicative needs. This approach not only enhances relevance and comprehension but also strengthens students' sense of ownership and engagement in the learning process [10].

In terms of novelty, this study offers a significant contribution to the existing body of literature by providing a PRISMA-based systematic mapping of podcast use in listening instruction over a recent five-year period (2020–2024). Unlike previous reviews that focus broadly on technology-enhanced language learning, this study specifically synthesizes empirical evidence on podcast-mediated listening comprehension in higher education. Its originality lies in identifying three pedagogical strategies—extensive listening, metacognitive integration, and collaborative podcast production—that consistently demonstrate effectiveness across diverse contexts. Furthermore, this study uniquely emphasizes the dual need for local content adaptation and technological capacity building, aspects that have been underexplored in earlier research. By addressing these gaps, the present review not only consolidates existing knowledge but also provides a clear roadmap for future research and practice in podcast-based listening instruction at the tertiary level [11].

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on listening instruction and technology-enhanced language learning highlights the importance of authentic input, engaging learning environments, and appropriate pedagogical strategies to support students' listening development. In this context, podcasts have emerged as a promising medium that offers both instructional value and motivational benefits, particularly in EFL learning environments such as Indonesia.

Listening in EFL Learning and the Role of Podcasts

Listening is a fundamental component of learning English because it enhances students' ability to understand spoken communication across various contexts. Vandergrift and Goh explain that listening involves complex cognitive processes, including interpreting intonation, decoding phonological forms, and constructing meaning based on contextual cues. This perspective highlights the importance of instructional approaches that expose learners to authentic language input rather than simplified or artificial materials [12]–[14].

In the Indonesian EFL context, students frequently demonstrate low listening proficiency due to minimal exposure to authentic spoken English. Putri et al identify a persistent gap between students' listening performance and curriculum expectations, noting that conventional classroom resources are insufficient to build strong comprehension skills. Newton and Nation further emphasize that traditional learning environments lack engaging listening materials capable of simultaneously stimulating motivation and comprehension development [15], [16].

In response to these challenges, the integration of digital technology has gained increasing attention in language education. Among various tools, podcasts have emerged as a flexible medium that provides continuous access to authentic listening input. Kalsum et al report that podcast-based learning encourages frequent listening habits and enhances learner autonomy because students can choose when and how to engage with the content [17]. This shift toward digital resources is supported by those who emphasize that modern learners perceive electronic and digital media as essential tools that bridge the gap between classroom theory

and practical linguistic application. Saragih et al. also state that adjustable pace and topic relevance make podcasts more motivating and meaningful for learners [18].

Theoretical Foundations and Research Gaps in Podcast-Based Listening Instruction

Several empirical studies have examined the impact of podcasts on students' listening development. Masitah find that the use of podcasts improves students' comprehension scores, particularly when combined with structured instructional guidance [19]. Similarly, Khoiriyah demonstrate that podcasts enhance students' learning attitudes and increase participation in listening activities. However, most studies tend to emphasize general benefits rather than systematically examining instructional frameworks or pedagogical strategies [20].

The use of podcasts is also aligned with theoretical perspectives on effective listening pedagogy. Flowerdew, argue that successful listening involves the interaction of top-down and bottom-up processing in constructing meaning from spoken input [21]. Richards highlights the importance of authentic, learner-centered materials for optimal listening development. Goh and Vandergrift further contend that flexible learning environments, such as podcasts, support metacognitive engagement, including monitoring comprehension and reflecting on listening performance [22].

Table 1. Literature Review

Focus Area	Key Scholars	Main Findings	Identified Gaps
Listening in EFL	Vandergrift & Goh; Newton & Nation	Listening involves complex cognitive processing and requires authentic input	Limited engaging materials in conventional classrooms
Podcasts in Language Learning	Kalsum et al.; Saragih et al.	Podcasts increase exposure, autonomy, motivation, and listening frequency	Lack of structured pedagogical frameworks
Empirical Podcast Studies	Masitah; Khoiriyah	Podcasts improve listening comprehension and learner attitudes	Focus mostly on general outcomes
Higher Education Context	Putri et al.	Podcasts are underexplored at the tertiary level	Limited local content and technological readiness

Despite these positive findings, some challenges remain evident in the existing literature. Many studies are conducted in secondary school contexts, while research focusing on higher education settings is still limited. Furthermore, technological constraints and the lack of locally relevant podcast materials pose difficulties for lecturers in designing appropriate learning resources [23]. These limitations indicate the need for more comprehensive studies exploring instructional strategies that optimize the benefits of podcast integration in university-level listening courses.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Review Protocol (PRISMA-Based SLR)

This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to examine and synthesize previous studies on the use of podcasts to improve students' listening comprehension skills. This approach was selected to ensure an organized, transparent, and comprehensive review of academic publications, enabling the mapping of research trends and the evidence-based evaluation of instructional effectiveness [24]. The SLR procedure followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) protocol proposed by Moher et al. (2009). The review process consisted of five sequential stages: (1) formulating research questions; (2) locating relevant literature; (3) screening articles based

on inclusion and exclusion criteria; (4) extracting and synthesizing data; and (5) reporting findings through a PRISMA flowchart.

Data Sources, Search Procedures, and Selection Criteria

This research relied on secondary data obtained from journal articles discussing the integration of podcasts in listening instruction. The dataset was collected from reputable academic databases, namely Google Scholar, SINTA, and Scopus, using the primary keyword "podcast for listening skills." The search process was conducted between February and April 2024. Article selection applied purposive sampling with the following inclusion criteria: (1) published between 2020 and 2024; (2) focused on the effectiveness of podcasts in improving listening skills; and (3) indexed in SINTA or Scopus. Studies unrelated to the topic or unavailable in full text were excluded from further review.

Data Extraction, Analysis, and Synthesis

Each selected article was examined to extract essential information, including publication year, research method, participant characteristics, instructional strategies, and reported outcomes. The extracted data were then organized, compared, and categorized to identify recurring themes and emerging trends in podcast-based listening instruction. To strengthen the synthesis, bibliometric mapping using VOSviewer was employed to visualize conceptual relationships and keyword distributions among the reviewed studies. Through this process, the review produced a comprehensive overview of the current state and future potential of podcast-based listening instruction in higher education contexts [25].

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the results of the systematic literature review conducted in this study. The findings are organized to provide a comprehensive overview of how podcast-based learning has been examined in previous research, particularly in relation to students' listening comprehension skills. The analysis begins with a description of the article selection process using the PRISMA model, followed by an examination of publication trends and methodological orientations across the selected studies. In addition, bibliometric mapping using VOSviewer is presented to illustrate the conceptual relationships and thematic developments within the reviewed literature [26]. Together, these findings offer a clear picture of research progress, dominant focuses, and emerging directions in the study of podcasts as a learning medium for listening skills.

Description of Data Selection Using the PRISMA Model

To ensure a systematic and transparent literature selection procedure, this study used the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-analysis) approach. The PRISMA framework was developed by Moher et al. (2009) as a collection of instructions or processes to methodically search for papers and manuscripts for systematic review studies utilizing a set of approaches. The keyword "podcast for listening skills," published between 2020 and 2024, was used to define the primary inclusion criteria. This time frame was chosen because of the notable rise in the usage and study of podcasts as a language learning tool, which was primarily brought about by the post-COVID-19 period. The Google Scholar database yielded 16,900 results during the Identification Stage of the selection procedure. 130 records were ready for the Screening Stage after duplicates were removed [27].

Due to their lack of relevance to the study's topic or emphasis, 96 records in all were eliminated. 34 reports' complete texts were requested during the Eligibility Stage; however, 4 reports were disqualified due to their inability to be accessed or recovered. Four of the thirty reports that were successfully obtained and evaluated were eliminated because they did not fit the population criteria (not focused on students) [28]. This rigorous selection process

resulted in 26 primary studies that fully met all inclusion criteria (topic, year of publication, and population relevance) and were ready for in-depth analysis in this systematic literature review. Analysis of the characteristics (n=26) of the included studies was then used to identify clear patterns and trends in research development.

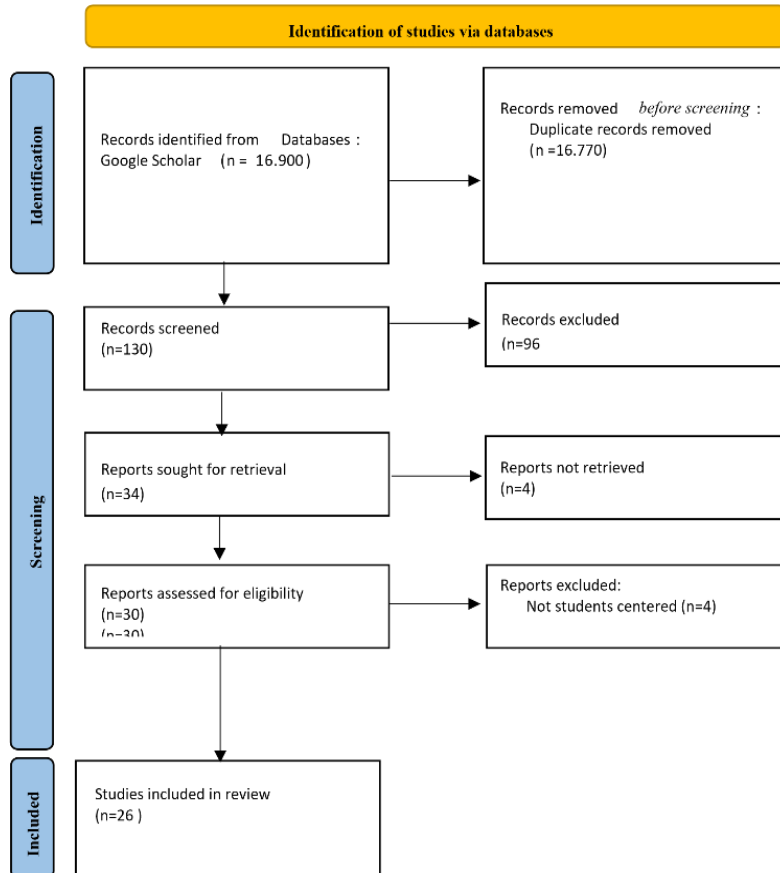


Figure 1. PRISMA Flowchart of the Selection Process Steps

Research Publication Trends (2020-2024)

1. Distribution of Publication by Year

Table 2. Research Distribution by Year

No	Publication Year	Article Publication	Percentage (%)
1	2020	3	11.5
2	2021	5	19.2
3	2022	7	26.9
4	2023	8	30.8
5	2024	3	11.5

The data presented above demonstrates that, in keeping with the growing demand for digital learning materials, publications on the subject of utilizing podcasts to enhance the listening skills of students have increased dramatically. Only three papers, or 11.5% of the total, and five articles, or 19.2% of the total, were published in 2020 and 2021, respectively. The early phases of the epidemic, when researchers and educators were still adjusting to technology-based learning and had not yet extensively used podcasts as an alternate listening medium, can be blamed for the dearth of studies during this time. Nonetheless, publications increased to 7 articles (26.9%) in 2022 and 8 papers (30.8%) in 2023, the greatest amount

throughout the study period. This rise indicates that podcasts are starting to be recognized as a useful and flexible learning tool for both in-person and remote learning. The number of publications decreased to 3 in 2024 (11.5%), either as a result of incomplete indexing or data covering only a portion of the current year. Generally, the higher trend of publications in 2022–2023 indicates that the use of podcasts as an innovation in listening learning has received more scientific attention, particularly following the significant shift to online learning.

2. Dominance of Research Methodology

Table 3. Research Design Used in Selected Studies

No	Research Design	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Quantitative (Experimental, Quasi-Experimental, correlational)	14	53.8
2	Qualitative (Case Study, Perception, Survey, Narrative Analysis)	5	30.8
3		7	15.4
Total		26	100%

Based on the data, 14 studies, or 38.5% of the examined publications, used quantitative research designs, namely experimental, quasi-experimental, and correlational methods. This quantitative dominance suggests that researchers typically compare pre-test and post-test scores to assess the efficacy of podcasts, enabling empirical and statistical testing of the effects of media consumption. Additionally, 30.8% of research included qualitative methods such as surveys, case studies, perception studies, and narrative analysis. In addition to evaluating learning results, this kind of research investigates students' perspectives and experiences with using podcasts as a listening learning tool, leading to a deeper comprehension of pedagogical and psychological elements.

Furthermore, a blended strategy that integrated the benefits of quantitative and qualitative approaches was applied in 19.2% of the publications. Because it can describe the responses, motivation, and engagement of students during the podcast-based learning process while also explaining the impact of developing listening skills, this mixed design option enriches the analysis. The distribution of study designs in this table, therefore, demonstrates that while quantitative techniques continue to dominate the assessment of podcast efficacy in the context of education, the tendency to combine methodologies is expanding to generate more complete results.

Bibliometric Mapping: VOSviewer Visualization

The fundamental conceptual framework in the literature was validated by analysis using VOSviewer software, which was based on information from 26 articles.

1. Network Visualization

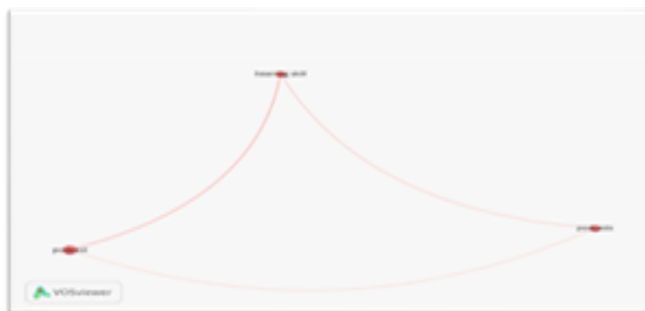


Figure 2. Network Visualization Podcast for Students Listening Skills (2020-2024)

The network is dominated by three main nodes: ‘podcast’, ‘listening skill’, and ‘podcasts’. The closest and thickest connections are seen between ‘podcast’ and ‘listening skill’, confirming that the main conceptual focus of all the literature reviewed is the use of podcast media as an intervention to improve listening skills.

2. Overlay Visualization

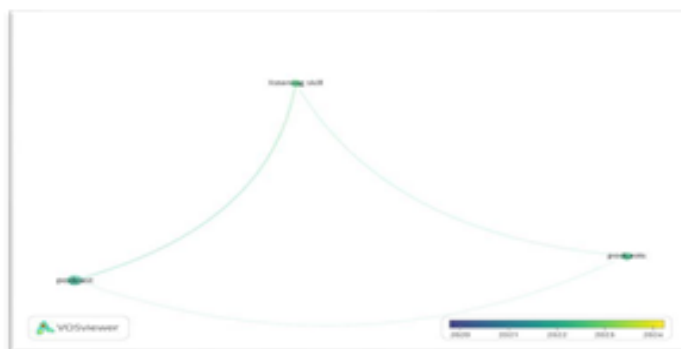


Figure 3. Overlay Visualization Podcast for Students Listening Skills (2020-2024)

This visualization presents the chronological (time) dimension. The ‘podcast’ node shows colors that tend to be earlier (purple/blue, around 2020–2021), indicating that basic media validation was the initial focus. In contrast, the ‘podcasts’ node (plural form) shows a shift in color towards bright green-yellow (around 2023–2024), indicating that more recent research focuses on diversifying applications, such as metacognition or advanced reviews. The ‘listening skill’ node shows colors in the middle of the time scale, confirming that this focus remains relevant and is studied consistently throughout the 2020–2024 period.

3. Density Visualization

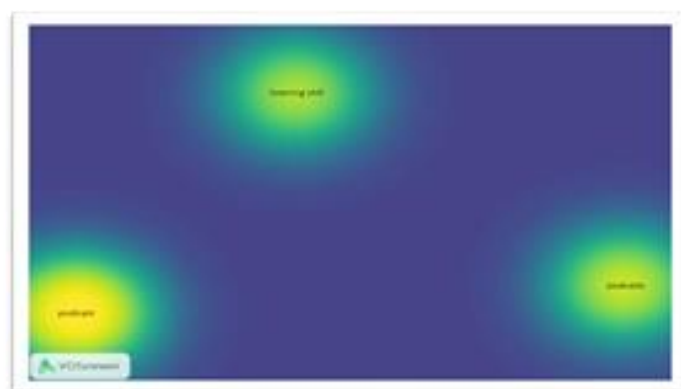


Figure 4. Density Visualization Podcast for Students Listening Skills (2020-2024)

This visualization shows a high concentration in the same three areas: ‘podcast’, ‘listening skill’, and ‘podcasts’. This high and distributed density strongly confirms that these concepts are the most frequently and intensively discussed core topics in the literature.

Discussion

This research aimed to investigate the growing implementation of podcasts to enhance students’ listening comprehension in higher education. In line with this objective, the discussion in this section interprets the findings of the systematic literature review by examining research trends, pedagogical contributions, methodological orientations, and implementation challenges related to podcast-based listening instruction [29]. The discussion does not merely confirm the effectiveness of podcasts as a learning medium, but also

explains how and why podcasts contribute to listening development and what implications these findings hold for instructional practice at the university level [30].

Research Trends and Pedagogical Contributions of Podcast-Based Listening

The findings reveal that the increasing use of podcasts in listening instruction during the 2020–2024 period is consistent with theoretical perspectives that conceptualize listening as a cognitive process involving both bottom-up decoding and top-down meaning construction [31], [32]. Podcasts provide authentic, flexible, and repeatable exposure to spoken English, enabling learners to process linguistic forms while activating background knowledge and contextual schemata. These findings reinforce literature in the Indonesian EFL context that highlights limited exposure to authentic spoken English as a major barrier to effective listening comprehension [33]. Podcasts address this limitation by fostering autonomy, motivation, repeated practice, and metacognitive engagement. A key contribution of this review is the synthesis of three recurring pedagogical strategies: extensive listening, metacognitive-strategy integration, and collaborative podcast production, which shift podcasts from supplementary learning tools toward a structured instructional approach in higher-education listening pedagogy [34].

Practical implementation: These insights may be applied in university contexts by integrating podcasts into structured listening cycles (pre-listening, listening, reflection), embedding podcast modules into course syllabi aligned with learning outcomes, and implementing project-based activities such as student-produced podcasts that connect comprehension, reflection, and communication [35]. Such practices promote self-regulated, exposure-based listening development while ensuring that podcasts function as a curriculum-integrated and pedagogically grounded learning medium.

Methodological Insights, Structural Challenges, and Implementation Implications

The findings also demonstrate that most prior studies employ quantitative experimental and quasi-experimental designs, focusing primarily on measuring whether podcasts improve listening outcomes through statistical comparisons. However, listening development also encompasses affective, motivational, and cognitive dimensions that are better illuminated through qualitative and mixed-method approaches [36]. By integrating both methodological perspectives, this review shows that the effectiveness of podcasts is closely related not only to measurable score improvement but also to increased motivation, learning engagement, and learner autonomy, which aligns with findings in EFL motivation-based research [37], [38]. At the same time, the review identifies persistent constraints such as limited locally contextualized materials, technological barriers, and variations in lecturer readiness factors that create a gap between demonstrated instructional efficacy and practical implementation capacity. These findings indicate that the research focus should move beyond proving effectiveness toward strengthening institutional readiness and contextual implementation strategies in higher-education environments. To support sustainable integration, institutions should develop repositories of locally relevant podcast materials, provide professional-development training for lecturers in podcast-based instructional design and assessment, and formally embed podcast activities into curriculum structures and evaluation systems [39].

Overall, the discussion highlights that podcast-based listening instruction represents not only a technological innovation but also a pedagogical shift toward more learner-centered and exposure-rich learning environments. The consistent improvement in listening comprehension across studies confirms that podcasts function effectively when supported by structured instructional design rather than isolated use. Importantly, the synthesis demonstrates that pedagogical strategy selection plays a decisive role in determining learning outcomes. Extensive listening encourages habitual exposure, metacognitive integration strengthens learners' awareness and control of comprehension processes, and collaborative

podcast production enhances engagement through social interaction. These combined approaches respond directly to higher-education demands for autonomous and reflective learning [40], [41].

CONCLUSION

This systematic literature review aims to map the evolution and effects of podcasts on college students' listening skills from 2020 to 2024. The study confirms the hypothesis that podcast-based learning significantly improves students' listening performance and learning motivation. The rise in publication trends, which peaked in 2023, and the shift in focus from basic media validation to advanced pedagogy exploration, identified through VOSviewer analysis, indicate the maturity of this discipline. Substantially, this study successfully synthesizes three most effective pedagogical strategies: extensive listening, metacognitive integration, and collaborative podcast production as operational best practices at the university level. Nevertheless, their optimal implementation still faces persistent structural challenges, such as limited local content and technical skill gaps among lecturers. In conclusion, podcasts are a powerful, innovative approach, and future development efforts should shift from merely proving their efficacy to developing structural solutions to ensure their sustainable and optimal implementation. Based on the findings and identification of gaps in this review, several practical and academic recommendations are suggested. For lecturers and practitioners in higher education, it is recommended to explicitly integrate three proven effective pedagogical strategies (extensive listening, metacognitive integration, and collaborative podcast production) into the listening curriculum to maximize learning outcomes. In addition, institutions need to prioritize providing practical technical training for lecturers to overcome limitations in media content production and adaptation. For future researchers, it is recommended to conduct research focusing on the development of local content adaptation models for podcasts, specifically targeting socio-cultural and linguistic relevance in the Indonesian context. Future research could also explore in depth the relative effectiveness of each pedagogical strategy synthesized in experimental or mixed-methods designs that focus more on the student population, to provide stronger evidence regarding their practical application.

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Author's Contributions

All authors contributed equally to the research and writing of this article. Sefriani Niode focused on data collection and analysis. Andi Nurwati provided the theoretical framing and systematic literature review. Hasan Ayuba contributed to methodological design and final manuscript editing. Mohd Rabe proofreading and finishing.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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