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“Didn’t Have to Melt My Eyeballs”: Student Responses to Learning by Podcast in Journalism Education

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Abstract

This article uses a case study to explore how undergraduate students in a journalism class engaged with an educator-produced podcast as a pedagogical tool for asynchronous learning replacing out-of-class readings, and the podcast’s effectiveness in improving student learning outcomes. Applying educational engagement theory, it highlights how both podcast production elements and curriculum design were considered to help refresh a journalism subject and engage students more deeply in their learning across behavioural, affective, and cognitive dimensions. A student survey revealed a strong preference for learning via podcast than other media, and that the podcast was both enjoyable and useful for their learning. End of semester results also provided strong evidence for the podcast’s effectiveness in enabling positive learning outcomes. The study delivers new insights into what key factors make podcasting an effective pedagogical tool in university education and illustrates the benefits of educators tailoring teaching resources to students’ media consumption habits.

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Practitioner Notes

1. Practitioners can leverage podcasting to engage students in their learning by making content relatable and relevant, with specific benefits for journalism education.
2. When using podcasts for student learning, educators should consider how to integrate them into the curriculum and combine them with incentivised learning tasks to increase educational engagement.
3. With podcasting’s growing popularity, it offers a compelling way to engage students in their learning as reading rates among young people decline.
4. University educators should collaborate with colleagues to refresh course content and improve student learning outcomes.
5. Educators should be responsive to student feedback to improve course learning material.

Keywords

Podcasting, pedagogy, journalism, technology, education.

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Introduction

As podcasting has evolved, educators have increasingly experimented with ways of using the medium as a pedagogical tool in universities. As on-demand audio that can be listened to while doing other things, podcasting is well-suited to contemporary mobile learning practices (Rosell-Aguilar, 2016). The medium's low barrier to entry also has benefits for educators, with the wide availability of audio recording and editing software making it possible to deliver course content as an alternative or supplement to traditional lectures, text-based resources, and tutorials. This proved particularly useful amid the COVID-19 pandemic, as educators turned to podcasting as a way of delivering asynchronous learning material, which for some brought unexpected benefits in engaging students more deeply in course material (Dalonon, 2023; Wake et al., 2020).

Inspired by the effective pedagogical use of podcasting in times of disruption, this study investigates how podcasting can help to overcome some of the challenges facing journalism education. It describes how a bespoke podcast, *The Masterclass*, was developed by educators at The University of Melbourne in Australia to replace asynchronous text-based resources in an undergraduate journalism subject, with the aim of better engaging students in their learning.

This paper uses quantitative and qualitative analysis drawn from a student survey, which indicated that the podcast was much preferred over traditional text-based resources. Students reported that the podcast was both entertaining and useful as an educational tool, and made journalism seem more accessible as a career. The podcast and its integration with the subject's curriculum were prompted by educators' challenges engaging students with the subject and with news in general, as well as mediocre results for the subject with an average grade of 68.2 in 2023. It also addressed broader challenges in journalism education; keeping pace with a rapidly changing industry, replacing quickly outdated textbooks and better bridging theory and practice to produce job-ready graduates.

Research indicates that incorporating digital and mobile technologies in education can have benefits by engaging students in learning practices that align with their existing media consumption routines (Criollo-C et al., 2021). Podcasting presents a tantalising prospect in this regard, as a medium that is particularly popular among demographics most likely to be at university. Australia is a global leader in podcast listening where 65% of people aged between 18-39 listen to podcasts at least monthly (Edison Research, 2024). Podcast listening tends to be higher among those living in major metropolitan regions and with higher-than-average levels of education, indicators also associated with university attendance (Universities Australia, 2022). Furthermore, podcasting has long served as a form of "edutainment", reflected in the enduring popularity of productions such as *Radio Lab* and *Hardcore History*. With listeners regularly accessing podcasts both to be educated and entertained (Perks & Turner, 2019), the medium offers great potential as a teaching resource.

While there is limited data on exactly how widely podcasting is used as a teaching and learning tool across higher education, it is accepted that it has become ubiquitous (Thomas et al., 2026). Thomas et al.'s (2026) study, based on a scoping review of 91 publications, found that there is a lack of conceptual clarity about what an educational podcast is, encompassing anything from teacher-created content, in the form of a re-packaged lecture or bespoke learning materials developed in audio form, to audio projects students themselves create, and podcasts that are

tagged as 'education' in podcast platforms. Thomas et al. also advocate for more research on the motivations and experiences of educators in incorporating podcasts into a curriculum.

Although podcasting is widely studied in higher education (e.g., Besser et al., 2021; Waldron et al., 2023), and has also been examined in journalism education (e.g., Mehendale, 2023; Palomino-Flores et al., 2023; Wake & Bahfen, 2016), less attention has been paid to podcast form. In particular, research rarely considers how production choices such as format, structure, hosting style, sound design and duration shape student engagement and ultimately learning outcomes. This requires attention on not only the technology of podcasting itself, but also the pedagogical opportunities it offers through its integration with a curriculum (Torres, 2011). More broadly, there is limited research based on the student perspective in journalism education, particularly focused on journalism practice (McCarthy et al., 2022).

This study responds to this research gap, and the specific problems identified by the authors in their experience teaching an undergraduate journalism subject, guided by the following research questions: (1) How do undergraduate students in a journalism subject engage with a bespoke podcast, created to replace out-of-class readings, as a key learning tool? (2) Does creating a bespoke podcast and integrating it into a subject's curriculum to reinforce lecture and tutorial content improve student learning outcomes?

Literature Review

This section bridges contemporary challenges facing journalism education with research into the role of podcasting in the higher education context, before considering how podcasting has been used in journalism pedagogy. First, it is important to establish the theoretical framework guiding this research.

Educational engagement: A theory for effective learning

In being concerned with role of podcasting in improving both the student learning experience and pedagogical outcomes, this study is underpinned by educational engagement theory. Eschewing traditional approaches to education as knowledge transfer (Rachmad, 2022), this reflects an idea that "students must be meaningfully engaged in learning activities through interaction with others and worthwhile tasks" (Kearsley & Shneiderman, 1998, p. 20). Kearsley and Shneiderman (1998) propose a three-tiered model, Relate-Create-Donate, to encourage student engagement. This involves learning activities that: (1) occur in a group context, where collaboration is encouraged; (2) are project-based, where ideas are operationalised; (3) have an outside focus, where learning activities and assessment tasks are linked to real-world, authentic contexts (p. 20)

Fredricks et al. (2004) emphasise the importance of understanding student engagement across three interlinked dimensions: behavioural, emotional, and cognitive. Behavioural engagement refers to participation in class or other activities, while emotional engagement relates to the relationships fostered with teachers, classmates, and others implicated in their education. The cognitive dimension involves student investment, including "thoughtfulness and willingness to exert the effort necessary to comprehend complex ideas and master difficult skills" (Fredricks et al., 2004, p. 60). They argue that to effectively enable student learning, these three dimensions should be meaningfully united in curriculum design and teaching practice.

Kearsley and Shneiderman (1998) argue that technology is key to facilitating engagement, an idea which has only become more pronounced in the contemporary era (Bond et al, 2020), given the capacity to leverage students' use of digital media to disseminate learning materials and foster collaboration. Godsk and Møller's (2025) study, based on a large-scale literature review, examines how different learning technologies can foster engagement across the three dimensions identified by Fredricks et al. (2004). They note that the provision of asynchronous audio and/or video learning materials can foster behavioural engagement by giving students flexibility to approach their learning independently. Technologies that promote communication and interaction among students and educators are highlighted as beneficial in supporting affective (emotional) engagement, while those that encourage active student involvement in problem-solving, hypothesis testing, and reflection are noted as key to encouraging cognitive engagement (p. 2958).

It is important to emphasise that the use of digital learning technologies alone is insufficient for fostering student engagement (Greener, 2022); their effectiveness depends on their pedagogical integration into different learning environments, and the extent to which they can unite the behavioural, emotional, and cognitive dimensions of engagement to promote positive learning outcomes (Godsk and Møller, 2025).

Journalism education and change

In recent decades, journalism has undergone vast transformation, accelerated by the digital revolution and collapse of traditional business models (Kirchhoff, 2022), and most recently, the emergence of Generative AI, which is playing a transformative role in retooling the industry, replacing many work processes that traditionally relied on humans (Simon, 2024). This has coincided with continued disruption of the profession's normative foundations, such as the commitment to objectivity (McNair, 2017). The ability for the public to 'talk back' to news media through online platforms also helped propel cultural change, with newsrooms called upon to address their lack of gender and racial diversity, and tendency to privilege White perspectives (Clark, 2022). The profession has also experienced a "crisis of trust" (Moran, 2023), with increasing numbers of the public turning to alternative sources of information. Relatedly, journalists have been accused of elitism, and disconnection from the realities of everyday life, in the USA, UK, and Australia (Fowler-Watt, 2023; McGill, 2016; Muller, 2016). Accordingly, the task of teaching journalism in contemporary times is challenging.

Despite the problems besetting journalism, and a decline in news media consumption (Newman et al., 2025), enrolments in university journalism and communications programs have largely remained steady (Cummins et al., 2023; Flew, 2024; Mensing, 2017), notwithstanding some more recent declines in the US (Cretser-Hartenstein et al., 2024). Interestingly, there is evidence that students who commit to journalism as a major or career remain strongly motivated and vocationally committed, as per studies in the US (Cretser-Hartenstein et al., 2024) and Australia (McCarthy et al., 2022). One priority in journalism education is to offer students practical training in reporting and give them a real-world insight into the industry, which often happens through internships, as a type of work-integrated-learning (WIL) program, whereby students spend time in a professional news organisation (Valencia-Forrester, 2020). Although valuable, internship opportunities are often limited, available only to the highest achieving students – and/or those who can afford to work for little or no pay (Zheng & Bluestein, 2021). A challenge for journalism educators therefore is to find ways of embedding industry-standard practices and perspectives

into course curricula, in addition to any internship offerings, to help provide equity of access. As a “servant of two masters” (Mehendale, 2023, p. 78), journalism education must provide more than just practical training; it must also instil in students a critical understanding of journalism’s public function.

A further issue for journalism educators is how to enliven traditional pedagogical approaches that have relied primarily on texts and weekly readings. Research indicates that approximately 20-30% of undergraduate students complete their assigned readings in university courses, a figure that has been in general decline over recent decades (Kerr & Frese, 2017; Schnee, 2018). For journalism students, an added problem is that textbooks quickly fall out of date, as new media platforms and technologies emerge. Studies also show that introductory journalism textbooks tend to be oriented towards print journalism and prioritise the news media’s watchdog role to the exclusion of other journalistic functions and perspectives (Coatney, 2023; Hopper & Huxford, 2017). This is a problem for journalism education, which aspires to adapt to the rapidly evolving digital age, and produce job-ready graduates (Creech, 2024).

Podcasting and “podagogy”

Scholars have adopted the term “podagogy” to describe the variety of ways in which podcasting can be used to enable student learning (Acosta & Garza, 2011; Rosell-Aguilar, 2007). This includes: student-led projects involving podcast production (Fox & Ebada, 2022); the use of audio recordings to deliver student feedback in the educator’s own voice, which can be more nurturing, and personalised than written feedback (Palenque, 2016); and podcasting as an alternative or supplement to lectures and text-based resources (Evans, 2008). Despite growing interest in using podcasts as a teaching resource, their use in higher education is still limited and infrequent (Savall Ceres & Villafán Amezcua, 2025). Engzell et al. (2025) note that podcasts have not fully found their place in higher education, in part due to digital incompetence among educators, while Drew (2017a) notes “a degree of pushback” (p. 203) from educators concerned that podcasts’ entertainment value could make students less inclined to engage with other core text-based resources. These concerns reflect the enduring ‘text is king’ paradigm in the university setting, whereby alternative or newer media forms and technologies are considered of lesser pedagogical value, and not always encouraged by institutions (Thomas et al., 2026). To the contrary, there is evidence that podcasts can constitute a form of “deep learning” (Fox & Ebada, 2022, p. 55), particularly when used not merely as supplementary to other materials, but as a primary means of delivering course content (Drew, 2017b).

Waldron et al. (2023) adopt the term “critical pedagogy” to illustrate how podcasts can be used for teaching in ways that centre students’ needs and expose them to “alternative epistemologies” (p. 4). They emphasise that a key benefit is podcasting’s ability to incorporate diverse voices, which can unsettle hegemonic disciplinary norms where certain perspectives have historically been privileged over others. This can be achieved by involving a range of people as podcast co-hosts or interviewees. This is often easier than arranging one-off guest lectures, and it can feel more engaging and intimate. Waldron et al. (2023) further note that podcasts can help students understand complex ideas by exploring them in an accessible language, aided by relevant examples, thus fostering a positive attitude towards course material (Moryl, 2013; Waldron et al., 2023).

One of podcasting's key attributes that can enable deep learning is the capacity to inculcate intimacy and foster a parasocial relationship with podcast hosts and interviewees (Lindgren, 2016). This is leveraged through familiar and conversational speaking styles, often delivered directly into the listener's ears through headphones or earbuds. Schlütz and Hedder (2022) found that the parasocial relationship tends to be stronger among those who listen to podcasts more regularly. Furthermore, studies have shown that parasocial processes can positively impact learning outcomes, particularly through improving learner motivation (Beege et al, 2017; Beauteemps & Bresges, 2022). There is also potential for podcasting to enhance students' affective engagement through encouraging a positive relationship with teachers (Fredericks et al., 2004), for instance, where teaching staff host a podcast used as a learning resource. While there is limited scholarship specifically attesting to the effectiveness of the parasocial relationship in enabling learning, these studies suggest the medium could deliver significant benefits when harnessed effectively to cater to students.

Another podcasting affordance of relevance to student learning is the ability to multitask. Perks and Turner (2019) found multitasking to be a key attribute valued by American podcast listeners. Participants identified "temptation bundling" (the act of making a mundane task less boring by pairing it with podcast listening) and "feeding one's brain" (p. 113) as motivations for listening, gesturing towards an important educational role for podcasts. For students, accessing learning material via podcast allows it to be weaved into daily life such as during exercise or while commuting, which could foster behavioural engagement (Godsk and Møller, 2025). The benefit of convenience could mask important considerations around comprehension, however. In a study based on Belgian undergraduates, Coens et al. (2013) found that those who listened to an educational podcast while doing a secondary activity, such as walking or jogging, tended to perform lower on a comprehension test. Their results are not definitive, with factors such as the podcast's length and complexity likely impacting whether students could process educational content. However, this draws attention to the capacity for multitasking to negatively impact learning, as broader research has shown (May & Elder, 2018).

Engzell et al.'s (2025) study based on Swedish university students' experiences with educational podcasts found that the medium offers substantial benefits in fostering deep learning. They identified numerous production elements that should inform educators in developing podcasts to complement in-class teaching, including making sure podcasts are entertaining, run for between 20-30 minutes per episode, and include commentary and "real life examples from the teachers" (p. 361).

It is important to acknowledge that the rapid development of Generative AI tools has significant implications for podcasting in the educational context. Lee and Lui (2024) argue that requiring students to work with an audio medium can encourage creativity and collaboration, which could otherwise be threatened by students' use of Large Language Models (LLMs) to complete text-based assessment tasks. AI tools also offer new opportunities to create pedagogical podcasts more easily and more cheaply than in the past. In their study of undergraduate students' using AI-generated podcasts at a German university, Benner et al. (2025) found that students valued the flexibility, accessibility, and succinct delivery. However, students disliked the "robotic" voices, and reported that complex concepts were sometimes rushed, which reduced suitability for auditory learning. Fox (2025) warns that this characteristic of AI-generated podcasts can have the effect of normalising mediocrity, and "obscure the craft of authentic storytelling" (2025, n.p.),

which is particularly consequential for courses that have audio projects as part of assessment. The “sonic slop” (Goldstein quoted in Fox, 2025, n.p.) characterising AI-generated podcasts, with their flat delivery, and impersonal aesthetic, also threatens to undermine the benefits that educational podcasts can deliver in connecting students more meaningfully with teachers-as-podcast-hosts, and fostering the broader, human-centred engagement central to effective learning.

Podcasting and journalism education

As a medium that is growing in popularity and is increasingly being used as a new and innovative outlet for journalism (Bird & Lindgren, 2024), podcasting offers great potential for engaging students in their journalism education. Scholarship in this area has so far tended to focus on the teaching of podcasting itself. Based on a mapping exercise of the status of audio within journalism curricula at Australian universities, Wake and Bahfen (2016) concluded that journalism education was slow in incorporating podcasting. More recently, Mehendale (2023) made a similar point about the Indian context, identifying a need for journalism education to teach news podcasting as a key skill, to prepare students for an evolving industry.

Palomino-Flores et al. (2023) further note that podcasting can help prepare students for the technological demands of industry, labelling it a “revolutionary teaching tool” for journalism (p. 1). In their study, students were required to listen to a journalism podcast and rate its quality, then make their own podcast episode. Results indicated that the practice of making the podcast engaged students in the subject and motivated them to learn (Palomino-Flores et al., 2023). The authors conclude that podcasting could effectively be used to supplement traditional material in journalism courses.

Huntsberger and Stavitsky’s (2006) study outlines how an educator-produced podcast was created for a journalism subject at the University of Oregon, with episodes designed as conversational summaries of course content. A survey of the students enrolled in the subject found that the podcast was valued and engaged them in their learning, with the lecturer’s personable tone in the podcasts also resonating. The researchers noted that they could not offer definitive conclusions about whether the podcast resulted in better student performance. They also cautioned the podcast could have made students less inclined to engage with traditional supplementary resources such as readings. It is also worth noting that the study was conducted at a very early stage in podcasting’s evolution, when technology was less advanced, making multitasking more difficult, and the medium was far less popular. Nonetheless, it adds weight to evidence from other studies that delivering course material via podcast can motivate students to learn, with the parasocial relationship facilitated by the educator-as-podcast-host a factor.

This literature review has highlighted how podcasting could be effectively used in journalism education to engage students in their learning and prepare them for a career in an industry that is experiencing technological transformation. One common use of educator-produced podcasting in higher education is to deliver course material, such as summaries of readings or lecture content (Huntsberger & Stavitsky, 2006). However, there has been little research focussing more closely on how asynchronous podcasts could comprise a key course resource, provided instead of, or in addition to, out-of-class readings. There has also been limited research on students’ experiences of bespoke educator-produced podcasts in journalism subjects. We also know little about how such podcasts foster behavioural, emotional, and cognitive engagement or whether they improve

learning outcomes. There is also a need to understand how learning via podcast could provide students with a direct and human insight into the reality of working as a journalist, particularly in the context of an evolving media landscape. This study addresses these research gaps and also responds to Engzell et al.'s (2025) call for more empirical studies outlining strategies for maximising “the full potential of podcasts as an educational tool” (p. 365).

Methodology

For this case study, a group of educators made a bespoke podcast of twelve episodes for flipped classroom learning for a second-year undergraduate subject called Introduction to Text & Audio Journalism. The weekly podcast replaced out-of-class reading, with students still attending lectures and tutorials. The podcast reinforced learning by requiring students to complete a task relating to the podcast topic ahead of their tutorial and then spend some tutorial time discussing and analysing their findings to help foster behavioural and affective engagement. Students also had to produce their own audio features for their final assignment, so the five hours of podcast material they had already consumed helped them achieve the highest level of learning according to Bloom's revised taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001).

The educators surveyed students about their experience listening to the podcast, and compared students' results and course satisfaction feedback, recorded via regular end of semester surveys, with previous years. This study mainly reports on the survey findings, rather than focusing on the making of the podcast. However, it is important to provide some details about how the podcast was produced, and the institutional context.

Institutional and podcast context

The subject, Introduction to Text & Audio Journalism, is not part of a journalism degree; rather, it is an introductory subject in a broad Arts degree at The University of Melbourne. Many of the students taking the subject have no journalistic experience and would not necessarily intend to become professional journalists.

Two earlier seasons of *The Masterclass* had been produced for other subjects in a Journalism Master's degree. This third season was the first to be produced for a more general undergraduate cohort.

In this subject, student learning consisted of a 1-hour lecture followed by a 1.5-hour tutorial. Educators had noted challenges with teaching the subject in previous years, with low student compliance in completing assigned readings, and a general lack of engagement in tutorials or with the news media. This was reflected in mediocre results; in 2023, the mean grade was just 68.2. In the University's End of Semester Student Subject Experience Survey, in 2023, the mean scores out of 5 (where 5 is highest satisfaction) for the question “Overall I had a good learning experience in this subject” was 4.03.

Thus, educators were aiming to find new ways of engaging students, motivating them to engage with course content and the news media, and ultimately improving learning outcomes. It was decided that podcasting could provide a suitable means, given the medium's growing popularity, with evidence of its effective use in the higher education context.

The third season of *The Masterclass* podcast was funded by a university Teaching and Learning Initiative grant of AU\$30,000 and produced between November 2023 and May 2024. Associate Professor Louisa Lim, the subject coordinator, hosted the podcast, continuing the format of previous seasons, while the subject's head tutor, Dr Dylan Bird, produced and edited the episodes. Both have extensive podcast production experience and had taught the subject for several years. A sound designer was engaged to enhance the listening experience, and Dr Wajeehah Aayeshah supported the integration of the podcast into the subject curriculum.

The podcast comprised twelve episodes, one for each week of the semester with every episode featuring a different journalist in Australia talking about one aspect of their work, with episodes running for 22-27 minutes (the mean episode duration was 24:45). The first episode was published on 19 February 2024 for week 1 of the semester, and the final episode on 14 May 2024 in the semester's final week.

The style of the podcast was casual and conversational, incorporating self-reflections and personal experiences from both the host and guests, to help build parasocial interactions. As such, the approach aligns with Engzell et al.'s (2025) advice for producing effective educational podcasts. The interviewees were chosen to showcase diverse voices, with a focus on Indigenous and migrant journalists, as well as journalists at the start of their career. There were four male guests and eight female guests. Three of the twelve were graduates from The University of Melbourne and two had done the subject in question, with the intention of demonstrating the accessibility of a journalism career.

To reinforce learning outcomes, each interviewee was asked to give two top tips at the end of their episode. Then, to consolidate learning, the interviewee set a task for students to complete before each week's tutorial, which involved critically engaging with the news media. Students would post the task to a communal Padlet and spend the first fifteen minutes of each tutorial discussing and comparing their work, with the tutor offering guidance. These tasks contributed to 25% of the subject grade to incentivise student participation (10 of the tasks were marked, from weeks 2-11, with students given 2.5 points per task completed). This purposeful integration of the podcast into the subject's curriculum was done to foster collaboration, bidirectional communication, and student commitment to learning, which align with Fredricks et al.'s (2004) three dimensions of student engagement, and are key principles to successfully integrating new technology into learning environments (Torres, 2011).

Because the specific aims of this research were to produce a podcast that could engage students in the subject, improve learning outcomes, and serve as a model of a high-quality podcast which would inform students' audio assignment, it needed to be produced with considerable resources and expertise. An AI-generated podcast would not have been capable of engaging students in the same way, particularly given the emphasis on including the diverse perspectives, and voices, of working journalists.

The Masterclass won two awards at the 2024 Australian Podcast Awards and in 2025 was a finalist in the prestigious New York Festivals Radio Awards. The teaching team also won the 2024 award for Outstanding Teaching in a Journalism Program, granted by the Journalism Education and Research Association of Australia, for their success with *The Masterclass*.

Survey

An online survey was designed for all 224 students enrolled in the subject in semester 1, 2024. It included multiple-choice questions and some questions requiring short written responses. Research shows that requiring students to provide qualitative feedback alongside multiple choice responses in surveys is important for generating nuanced findings about the effectiveness of teaching approaches (Santhanam et al., 2018).

The survey began with questions about participants' age, gender, and enrolment type (domestic or international), before asking about their general podcast listening frequency. Questions then related to their experience listening to *The Masterclass*, including what they were usually doing while listening (e.g., commuting, doing housework, exercising), and how enjoyable and useful for their learning it was. They were asked whether the podcast and weekly tasks made the subject more enjoyable. Participants were also prompted to provide short qualitative responses on whether the podcast influenced how they think about journalism and were invited to share any additional general reflections on *The Masterclass*. These questions were partly informed by Perks and Turner's (2019) influential uses and gratifications study on podcast listeners, which gathered both qualitative and quantitative data to understand why people access podcasts, however the questions in our survey were adapted to explore students' experiences of listening to the podcast as a learning tool, in order to answer the research questions.

Ethical clearance for the survey was granted by The University of Melbourne (Ref: 2024-28449-51194-4). The survey was then distributed to students via purposive sampling through the subject's page on the Learning Management System, and via direct email from a University of Melbourne staff member who was not teaching the subject. This was done to help reassure students that the survey was entirely separate from any assessment in the subject, as per the ethics application.

Analysis of results

There were 59 valid responses to the survey, which was circulated to all 224 students enrolled in the class, indicating a response rate of 26%, which may reflect the voluntary nature of survey participation and end-of-semester timing. Accordingly, survey findings should be interpreted with caution, as respondents may have been those more motivated to provide feedback or those with particularly strong views about the podcast. Among these responses, if students ignored certain questions, responses were still retained as non-answers as they do not affect the validity of responses to other questions.

Descriptive statistics were first generated using Qualtrics' built-in Stats iQ. Because the survey responses were primarily nominal and ordinal, chi-square tests were conducted to explore the relationships between participant characteristics and perceptions of the podcast. Given the modest sample size and uneven subgroup distribution, these inferential analyses were treated as exploratory. To analyse the qualitative responses to open-ended questions, NVivo was used for thematic analysis.

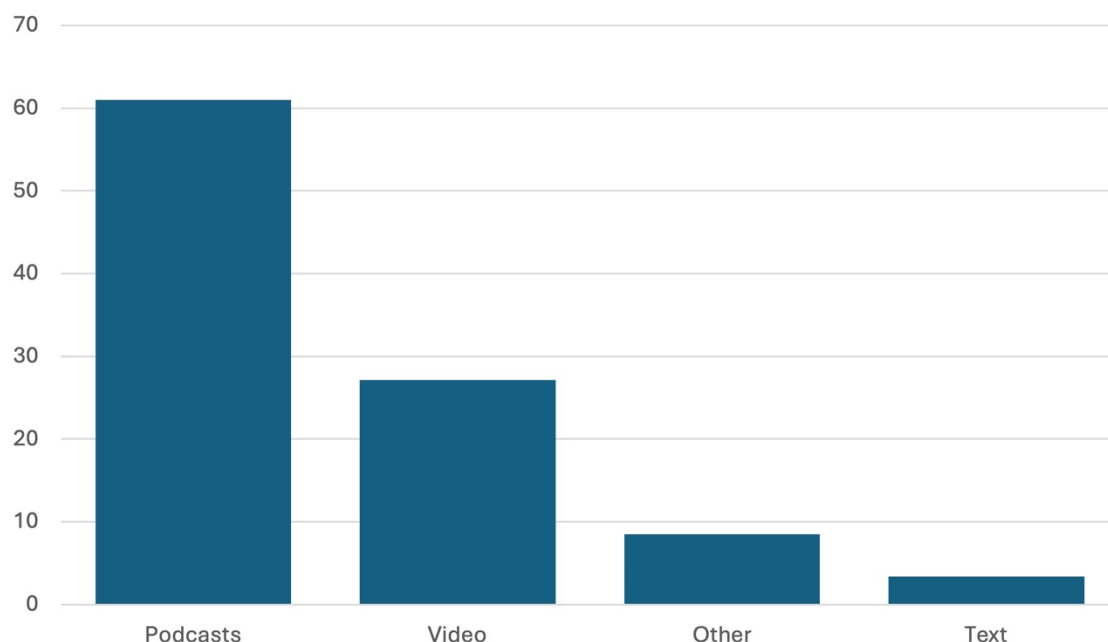
The median age of respondents was 20.2, with 67.8% enrolled as domestic students and 32.2% as international students. The cohort was overwhelmingly female, as is broadly typical in journalism degrees in Australia, with 74.6% female respondents, 23.7% male, and 1.7% non-binary.

The vast majority of respondents found *The Masterclass* both useful and enjoyable as a learning resource, with 72.9% of respondents saying it was extremely or very useful to their learning, and 76.3% saying it was extremely or very enjoyable. None of the participants chose 'Not at all' useful or enjoyable.

One of the most significant findings was that, after a semester of listening to asynchronous weekly podcast episodes, students expressed a clear preference for learning materials in the audio format. When asked their preferred method for out-of-class learning, 61% of respondents expressed a preference for podcasts, 27.1% for video or other audiovisual media, and just 3.4% for text (see Figure 1). This finding challenges the 'text is king' paradigm that has dominated higher education, illustrating how students' learning habits might be changing in line with technological change.

Figure 1

Students' Preference for Out-of-class Learning Materials

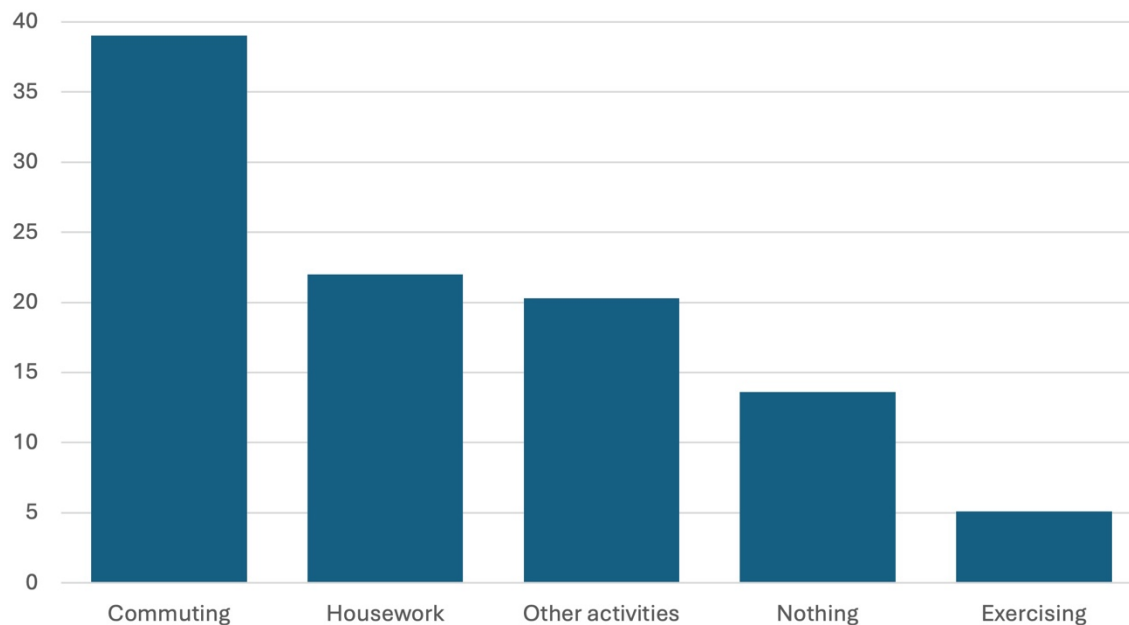


There was a statistically significant relationship between students' general podcast listening habits and how useful and enjoyable they found *The Masterclass* as a teaching resource. Students who listened to podcasts more regularly were more likely to find the podcast useful and enjoyable. This finding requires more investigation, especially given the increase in monthly podcast consumption in Australia, 12% from 2022-2025 (Edison Research, 2025b). As podcast use continues to rise, educators should consider whether podcasts might be a more effective way to deliver out-of-class content than text-based resources.

Students made use of the affordances of podcasting, with 86.4% reporting multi-tasking while listening to *The Masterclass*. The activities that students were undertaking while listening are noted in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Activities Undertaken by Students While Listening to The Masterclass Podcast



The most common activity was commuting (39%), followed by housework (22%), ‘other activities’ (20.3%), nothing (13.6%) and exercising (5.1%). The results showed one interesting trend: domestic students were more likely to listen while commuting (47.5%) while international students were more likely to listen while doing housework (31.6%). This probably reflects living arrangements, with domestic students likely to live further from the university’s city centre location and spending more time commuting.

There were also quantitative results from the University’s End of Semester Subject Experience Survey, which showed a clear improvement in each of the six categories. On a scale out of 5, where 5 was the highest satisfaction, the mean subject score increased from 4.05 in 2023 to 4.15 in 2024. One noticeable increase was “Overall I had a good learning experience in this subject”, which increased from 4.03 in 2023 to 4.2 in 2024. Student grades also improved, from 68.2 in 2023 to 72.1 in 2024. The average grade for tutorial tasks, which made up one component of assessment, was 84.2 out of 100, indicating sustained engagement over the semester. It cannot be proved to what extent each of these changes was due to learning via podcast, but given that the podcast was the only significant change to the subject from previous years, with other assessment tasks, learning outcomes, and weekly topics unchanged, it is probable that the podcast was a significant factor, given the positive results recorded in the podcast-specific survey.

Qualitative responses were analysed inductively and then coded to identify key themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This added further insights into the effectiveness of the podcast as a learning tool. A recurrent theme was the benefit of being able to multitask, which students said was enabled not only through podcasting’s mobile technology, but also the informal and accessible approach of the host and interviewees. One wrote, *“It felt more engaging as you were listening to something you enjoyed and could apply in a practical sense.”* Another wrote, *“It was less work than doing*

readings with a bunch of academic jargon that makes no sense." One respondent appreciated the ability to go for a walk while listening to the podcast, which they said made their *"brain more relaxed to presently learn and take in information"*.

Another theme was the experience of learning through listening, which numerous students said was new to them. Many reported a positive experience engaging with the podcast as a key learning resource, with one commenting, *"I think I learn better when information is verbalised to me"*. Another reported that *"the whole process of learning with the podcast [was] very stimulating"*. However, not all students found the podcast so amenable to their learning, with one commenting, *"I am not an audio learner, so there was a journey in discovering that about myself."* Another wrote, *"I am not a fan of podcasts in general – they are slow and I have audio processing difficulties. I need to read things at my own pace."* Another student wrote, *"I think it's been moderately useful, but probably not as useful as just watching a lecture (I think visual elements help me)."* Learning resources can never be universally popular, yet this opportunity to provide students with journeys of discovery regarding their own learning methods constitutes an unexpected pedagogical bonus. These insights were useful for informing changes to the subject, with transcripts of podcast episodes added for accessibility reasons and to cater for different learning styles.

A third theme related to the podcast's integration with the curriculum. The analysis revealed that the opportunity for students to reflect on their listening in class, and discuss their approach to set tasks in tutorials, ensured that even those who did not value the podcast could still accrue positive learning outcomes. One commented that the podcast *"Allows you to learn in a fun way...and then immediately be able to apply your knowledge"*, highlighting that the tutorial activity and discussion was a crucial component in student learning.

When asked what they liked about the podcast, one wrote, *"It's far more accessible than traditional readings as I am able to be engaged at any time, multitask etc."* Another commented,

It was such a smart way of engaging students with content, hearing from professionals in the field and also making readings more accessible. Sometimes I find all the weekly readings for other subjects overwhelming (sic) but the Masterclass podcast allowed me to listen on the way to work and uni.

One respondent also noted that they rarely made it to the end of academic readings for other subjects, but found *The Masterclass* *"very consumable and easy to listen"*.

Above all, students welcomed a new approach, with the words *"different"*, *"differing"* *"variety"* and *"diverse"* occurring frequently, as well as comments favouring the podcast in comparison to the high reading load across multiple subjects. One commented, *"I found I digested the information a lot more."* Another simply wrote, *"Didn't have to melt my eyeballs scrolling through pages of reading."*

Another theme was the parasocial affordances of the podcast, which helped to provide students with a sense that journalism was accessible as a career. Several students commented on the intimacy of voice; for example, *"I liked the variety and calibre of the guest interviewees and also that it was personal and engaging – hearing the person's voice instantly made me more engaged and curious in what they had to say."* Another highlighted the *"hugely interesting characters"* in the podcast, and noted that hearing from professional journalists directly *"gave it more credibility"*.

The idea of accessibility also translated through the medium, with students reporting that they believed the ‘behind-the-scenes’ exposure made the industry more accessible. One wrote, *“It makes the career feel a lot less daunting and closed off to me; the transparency it provides removes a lot of uncertainty, and makes me less nervous about entering journalism as a career path”*.

Discussion

This study found that the majority of students (86.4%) tended to multitask when listening to this educator-produced podcast. Nonetheless, they rated the podcast highly as a useful and enjoyable learning tool, with more than 72% rating it as extremely or very useful to their learning. The podcast’s effectiveness in engaging students was evidenced in the high student satisfaction with the subject in 2024 and the high mean grade, 84.2 for podcast tasks. Podcast-specific affordances, such as the ability to multitask, and the cultivation of an intimate parasocial relationship through a conversational approach, were motivating students to learn. A crucial component to enabling student engagement across Fredricks et al.’s (2004) three dimensions was the inclusion in each episode of a task for students to complete, which would then promote student participation, collaboration, and reflection in the classroom. The significantly higher student grades in the subject, from a mean of 68.2% in 2023 to 72.1 in 2024, indicates that the podcast, and its integration into the curriculum, enabled positive learning outcomes.

Students overwhelmingly preferred learning through listening to podcasts compared with other media, with only 3% favouring traditional text-based resources. This finding comes amid growing concern about falling reading levels among university students (Horowitch, 2024). Figures from Australia’s Bureau of Statistics (2021-2022) show a precipitous decline in children’s reading habits, with the percentage of children aged between five and fourteen reading in their spare time falling six percentage points in four years, and almost one in four children spending twenty or more hours a week on a screen (Naylor, 2023). Meanwhile, Australia has seen a 12% increase in monthly podcast use from 2022-2025 (Edison Research, 2025b). Tertiary education has been slow to harness these changes in media consumption, and the primary role of text-based resources could be a barrier to learning for a student cohort that reads less.

The survey results indicate that students who listened more regularly to podcasts were more likely to find *The Masterclass* enjoyable and useful. This aligns with studies showing that students who are more familiar with a particular technology more readily embrace it in their learning (Arifin et al., 2025). Furthermore, it builds on evidence that the strength of the parasocial relationship in podcasting is positively correlated with listening frequency (Schlütz & Hedder, 2022), indicating how this could bring pedagogical benefits. The relationship between podcast consumption habits and levels of engagement is important as consumption habits are changing rapidly among younger generations. Tertiary educators have not grappled with the trend away from reading, with many lecturers continuing to prescribe large amounts of text-based resources for students. This study indicates the benefits of aligning learning material with students’ emergent media consumption habits; specifically, how pivoting away from text-based resources to podcasts can benefit students by meeting them where they are, and ensuring that learning content is accessible and relatable. It also helps educators’ future-proof their courses in line with the long-term migration away from reading.

Another factor behind the overwhelmingly positive response to the podcast was the novelty value, with many students commenting on the freshness of a set podcast instead of text-based resources. Students embraced the orality of podcasting (Lee & Lui, 2024), consistently remarking on how engaging and accessible it was as a medium. The revival of the oral tradition also allows students to benefit from the medium's intimacy, building a parasocial relationship with the lecturer. As per Waldron et al. (2023), we found that one of the elements students valued was the diversity of voices, which also served to unsettle hegemonic disciplinary norms pervading higher education.

It is apparent from the analysis that student engagement with the podcast and the subject in general was successful across Fredricks et al.'s (2004) three dimensions. Behavioural engagement was enabled through the podcast's accessible nature and the ability to multi-task empowered students to approach learning in their own ways. The students' positive response to the voices in the podcast indicates that it also nurtured engagement, which was further developed through the collaborative approach of the tutorial activities. The substantially higher student grades illustrate the podcast's success in delivering cognitive engagement in the form of positive learning outcomes. Additionally, the podcast's ability to connect students with working journalists helped facilitate an authentic engagement with the outside world. This is important not only for journalism education, where insights from practitioners are valuable but difficult to integrate into the curriculum, but for student engagement generally (Kearsley & Shneiderman, 1998).

It is worth noting the novelty value of a set podcast may not accrue in future if more educators adopt podcasting as a pedagogical tool. That perceived freshness may also be explained by the very deliberate approach taken by educators, who were proficient podcasters, and already experienced at teaching this subject. In this way, the perceived "freshness" was also engineered through considered choices, such as the informal tone, the decision to interview young and diverse journalists, and the use of music and audio examples. The team collaborated with an experienced podcast sound designer to optimise the pacing and engagement of the learning material.

The podcast's effectiveness as a teaching tool was also contingent on its integration with the course curriculum, indicating that any attempt to include more audio-based resources in university subjects should be carefully planned, with consideration for how they relate to practical activities and assessment tasks (Torres, 2011). That integration, which incentivised students' completion of set tasks by contributing to 25% of their overall mark, ensured their deep learning, even if they multitasked while listening to the podcast.

Conclusion

This study fills an important gap by demonstrating how an educator-produced podcast can play a role in students' journalism education. An overwhelming number of respondents expressed a preference for learning asynchronously via the podcast medium instead of through out-of-class text readings. Their engagement with the subject suggests that educator pushback to podcasting (Drew, 2017a) is not warranted, nor are fears that multitasking dilutes podcast-based learning. On the contrary, as media consumption habits change, educators may benefit from harnessing podcasting, which can be more effective than text-based resources for a cohort of students increasingly embracing the podcast medium in daily life.

This study found that the effectiveness of the podcast as a learning tool was related to how enjoyable it was to listen to. Furthermore, the formal recognition *The Masterclass* received, with two awards at the Australian Podcast Awards, highlights how podcasts can play an important role in educating the public generally, even when produced in a specific institutional context. However, it was the integration of the podcast into a specific curriculum, with assessed tasks that reinforced lecture material as well as feeding into tutorial activities, that ensured the podcast had real pedagogical value. As such, this study illustrates how elements of both 'edutainment' and 'podagogy' can be integrated to produce a podcast that benefits a discrete student cohort, and helps to build broader public understanding of journalism, which is facing challenges on many fronts.

This paper is not arguing for educator-produced podcasts to replace lectures or tutorials. It argues that when podcasting is used a key learning tool to supplement lectures and tutorials, it can be very effective. However, such learning material cannot exist in a vacuum. Students could be incentivised to engage with podcasts such as marks towards their final grade and provided with activities that transform passive listening into active learning. Additionally, pedagogical podcasting is often a time-intensive activity, which can require significant funding and expertise to be successful. While Generative AI presents important opportunities for educators to create podcasts to engage students through the affordances of flexibility and the ability to multi-task, this research indicates that the parasocial relationship the students developed with the podcast host and, particularly, with interviewees as real-life, professional journalists was central to its effectiveness. For this project, the considerable resourcing in the form of a \$30,000 grant was justified as modelling best practise since the students had to create their own audio work for their final assessment. However, there may be benefits for educators teaching in different disciplines, and with other pedagogical aims, to create podcasts with lower production values, potentially aided by AI. The decision to do so, however, should be carefully weighed against whether it could "normalise mediocrity" (Fox, 2025), or even cause students to disengage if the podcasts are impersonal and ineffective for audio-based learning.

Limitations

The findings in this paper refer to a bespoke podcast made by experienced audio producers and journalists for a specific subject that they also teach. As such, it should not be inferred that all educator-produced podcasts would deliver similar benefits. Its findings may be specific to Australia, which is at the forefront of podcast listening trends, and may not be similarly effective in other educational contexts. In countries where access to technology is limited, or podcasting listening is less common, the learning outcomes might be different.

It is worth noting that the 2025 US Infinite Dial reported that video integration is expanding the reach of podcasting, with increasing numbers of Americans both listening to and watching podcasts (Edison Research, 2025a). Podcast, social media and data consumption habits are changing rapidly, and these trends may impact student receptivity towards the podcast medium.

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