CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the introduction of this thesis. There are five parts included, such as the background of the study, the formulation of the problem, the operational definitions, the aim of the research, and the significance of the study.

1.1 Background of the Study

In communication, listening skills are fundamental skills for acquiring a language and communicating effectively. According to Putra and Dianti (2022), listening skills are important for fostering an individual's communicative competence. In line with that, Liubiniene (2009) stated that listening is the essential skill that determines successful communication. Additionally, in the language learning context, listening skills are a substantial component that the learners cannot ignore. Therefore, as Wah (2019) elucidates, that listening determines the language learning process since it is the basic skill in acquiring the language and enables students to communicate orally.

In the present language learning, technology is an assisting media that must be integrated into the learner's process of learning. Technology brings freedom to learners who tend to learn independently outside the class. According to Buana and Miftachudin (2021), technology can support learners to engage in self-directed learning with its convenience. Therefore, the opportunities to learn autonomously outside school are getting wider. In autonomous learning, learners have full control of what they want to do, what materials they want to learn, time flexibility, and decide how the learning process would be. As narrated by Buana and Miftachudin (2021), autonomous learning empowers learners to select their subject matter, organize their material, and determine how to present it in their styles, and no one will instruct them what they should do, therefore, their motivation will be boosted.

There is an abundance of technologies that can be used in the process of learning a language, one of them being podcasts. As Putra and Dianti (2022)

affirmed, podcasts have been utilized to support the learning activity. In addition, through realistic language conversations, podcasts might provide learners with a mirror of real-world listening conditions. It is in common with Şendağ et al. (2018) argument that podcasts provide authentic listening experiences and often reflect real-life situations. Podcasts are also considered appropriate to be implemented in language learning activities because they bring learners closer to the target language (Rahman et al., 2018). Therefore, podcasts are a considerable tool to be used since they will ease learners in their process of learning a language, particularly in their listening activities.

Among the various tools available, podcasts have gained significant popularity for enhancing listening comprehension. EFL learners increasingly rely on podcasts for their authentic content and real-life conversational language, allowing them to develop listening skills outside traditional educational environments. Several learners have autonomously listened to podcasts for months or even years and stated that they have their way of listening to them to make it more effective. They listened to various topics on podcasts, such as social, political, cultural, and many more.

Subsequently, previous studies have revealed that podcasts can be utilized in ELT classrooms, particularly in learners' listening activities. In a study conducted by Widodo and Gunawan (2019); Indahsari (2020); Syahabuddin et al. (2021); and Putra and Dianti (2022), they came up with a similar statement that podcasts can be used as a teaching aid and may be implemented in the language learning classroom. They studied the fact that listening to podcasts can be conducted in a language-formal classroom. However, these studies have not been directly related to the implementation of podcasts casually in autonomous listening activities. Therefore, the researcher revealed how EFL learners use podcasts in their autonomous language learning process, particularly in their listening activities.

1.2 Formulation of the Problem

In accordance with the background, this study formulates a research question: "How do learners use podcasts in their autonomous listening activities?"

1.3 Operational Definitions

1.3.1   Autonomous listening

Autonomous listening is a method of independently exploring audio and audiovisual sources to listen outside the classroom which the learners themselves determine their education by setting goals, selecting materials, determining strategies, and evaluating their progress independently.

1.3.2   Listening activities

Listening activities are the activity of listening to audio materials that consist of three activity stages: pre-listening, while-listening, and post-listening activities.

1.3.3   Podcasts

Podcasts are a popular audio-visual media that contains many topics, and most of them reflect real-life situations and relate to many people who listen to them. It can be accessed on any device, particularly smartphones. They are considerable to be utilized in language learning, specifically in autonomous listening activities.

1.3.4   Listening activities using podcasts

Listening activities using podcasts are learning practices where learners engage with podcast content to improve their proficiencies in a second language.

1.4 Aim of the Research

This study aims to investigate how EFL learners used podcasts in their autonomous listening activities.

1.5 Significance of the Study

1.5.1   Theoretical Significance

This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge on language learning by providing a deeper understanding of how EFL learners utilize podcasts for autonomous listening activities. It expands on theoretical frameworks related to self-directed learning, listening strategies, and the use of digital media in language acquisition. By identifying specific strategies across the pre-listening, while-listening, and post-listening stages, this research enhances the theoretical discourse on the efficacy of podcasts as a tool for fostering autonomous language learning.

1.5.2   Practical Significance

The practical significance of this study lies in its potential to inform and improve teaching practices. Educators can leverage the insights gained from the findings to design more effective listening activities and integrate podcasts into their curriculum. The study offers concrete strategies that teachers can implement to facilitate students' listening comprehension and engagement. Additionally, it provides learners with actionable techniques to enhance their autonomous listening practices, ultimately leading to better language proficiency and increased confidence in using the language.

1.5.3   Empirical Significance

Empirically, this study provides valuable data on the specific strategies employed by EFL learners when using podcasts for autonomous listening. The detailed thematic analysis of the semi-structured interviews with two participants offers rich, qualitative insights into their experiences and practices. This empirical evidence can serve as a foundation for future research, enabling scholars to build upon these findings and explore the effectiveness of podcasts in different contexts and with larger participant groups. The study also highlights the practical applications of these strategies, demonstrating their relevance and adaptability in real-world language learning scenarios.