

# Could AI Podcasts Improve Students' Academic Performance AND Engagement?: An Empirical Assessment

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**Abstract:** In recent years, podcasts have emerged as a significant educational tool that influences students' learning, academic performance, and retention, particularly within the context of business education. This study investigates the potential of Artificial Intelligence (AI)-generated podcasting as an innovative instructional tool to enhance student academic performance in business education. Leveraging generative AI to create short, topic-specific audio summaries, we integrated podcast episodes into an undergraduate business analytics course and evaluated their impact on student outcomes. Using a quasi-experimental design, we compared performance metrics between students who received AI podcast supplements and a control group with traditional materials. Survey and focus group data were also collected to assess engagement, comprehension, and perceived value. The study highlights how tailored, on-demand audio content can support student success in data-driven, concept-heavy business courses. The impact of podcast listening on students' learning, academic performance, and retention in business education is multifaceted. The integration of podcasts into educational practices offers distinct advantages, including enhanced listening skills, greater engagement through relatable content, and accessibility that support self-directed learning. Nevertheless, educators must navigate potential challenges in implementation to fully leverage the benefits of this dynamic learning tool. Future research should continue to explore innovative podcast applications and best practices to optimize learning outcomes in business education.

**Keywords:** AI, AI-generated podcasting, podcasts, business analytics, survey, undergraduate business education.

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## 1. Introduction

Conventional podcasts originated in the early 2000s and gained popularity in educational settings around 2005, following their integration into Apple's iTunes platform. This advancement provided wide reaching access and subscription to educational audio content for both educators and students. The next stage of podcasting emerged when instructors began recording and sharing their own material; however, this was often challenging due to the significant time commitment and technical expertise required, which were difficult to balance with already busy academic schedules. More recently, AI-generated podcasts have surpassed their conventional counterparts as a major teaching resource, offering students flexible, on-demand access to more course specific content. Unlike traditional lecture formats, these podcasts allow students to revisit material repeatedly and integrate learning into everyday activities such as commuting or exercising. Research suggests that this accessibility supports improved listening skills, fosters independent study, and enhances content retention (Harvard Business Publishing, 2024).

In business education, however, AI-generated podcast applications remain relatively limited and underutilized (Engzell, Norrman, Norberg, & Lundvall, 2025). Podcasts have been increasingly used in general management, marketing, and other business disciplines (Harvard Business Publishing, 2024; AACSB Insights, 2024), but few studies (to researchers' knowledge) have explored their role in more quantitatively intensive courses, one being business analytics. The latter is frequently identified as challenging, especially for undergraduate students due to its abstract content and the extensive use of statistics and spreadsheet application. The potential of AI generated podcasts to improve comprehension and reduce cognitive barriers in this context remains underexplored.

Conventional podcasts, while highly respected for their authenticity and emotional connection, require instructors to record, edit, and distribute episodes, an often time consuming and restrictive task. Numerous developments in generative artificial intelligence now make it possible to automate much of this process by producing short, topic or chapter specific podcasts that are tailored to course materials. AI generated podcasts can draw directly from lecture slides, test banks, quizzes, or other instructional resources, producing high quality, targeted content intended to reinforce course or program learning outcomes. One example is Google's NotebookLM, which allows instructors to upload course documents and produce AI-generated content in an audio form. Recent discussions highlight how tools like NotebookLM are being applied in academic settings to produce podcast style learning resources, providing

students with new avenues for engagement (AI Goes to College, 2024). This marks a possible transition using podcasts as an extra instructional resource to their role as an AI driven tool for content delivery.

Academic performance and student engagement in undergraduate business analytics courses are often influenced by the ability to understand and retain abstract material. Especially, asynchronous online courses in particular present additional challenges, as reduced direct interaction can weaken student motivation and comprehension. AI-generated podcasts may help address these challenges by offering clear, concise, and accessible explanations of key topics aligned with assessments. Emerging evidence suggests that podcasts can enhance engagement and comprehension when integrated with traditional instruction (Harvard Business Publishing, 2024). By aligning AI-generated episodes directly with quizzes and other evaluations, instructors may also foster greater retention and performance. Thus, podcasts, particularly those created through AI platforms, have the potential to improve both engagement and measurable academic outcomes in data-intensive business courses.

## **2. Literature Review**

Over the past ten years, podcasts have become increasingly prominent in business education. As a digital medium, they offer distinctive learning advantages by delivering content that is both accessible and adaptable to various schedules. This review brings together recent research on the educational value, benefits, and evolving use of podcasts within business learning environments. Podcasts offer a modern content medium for sharing knowledge, allowing students to interact with educational material in ways that traditional lecture formats may not offer, especially in online education. Their convenience enables learners to absorb information during everyday tasks, a point emphasized by Shaw and McNamara, who found that users favored realistic and easily digestible content while multitasking (Shaw & McNamara, 2021). This supports earlier findings by Singh et al., who noted that short, flexible podcast episodes can enhance learning by fitting into individual routines (Singh et al., 2016).

Studies such as those by Wang et al. highlight the growing role of podcasts in fields like nursing education, reinforcing the idea that digital tools are transforming how students learn (Wang et al., 2023). Evidence from Cho et al. suggests that incorporating podcasts into academic programs can boost student engagement and retention (Cho et al., 2017). The blend of storytelling and instruction found in podcasts creates a more immersive learning experience, as demonstrated by McNamara et al., whose research on Content Acquisition Podcasts showed improved comprehension of complex topics (McNamara et al., 2020). The effectiveness of podcasts in business education is increasingly supported by empirical data. Educational strategies that include podcasting have been linked to better test performance and heightened learner involvement, though Katz and Nandi caution that more studies are needed to confirm these outcomes across diverse curricula (Katz & Nandi, 2021). Despite promising results, challenges persist—particularly the need for robust evaluation methods to accurately assess podcast impact, as noted by Raupach et al. (Raupach et al., 2015).

Current trends show that business and educational podcasts are integrating sophisticated teaching models and promoting collaborative learning. Research indicates that podcasts can foster communities of practice, encourage interaction among learners, and enrich shared understanding (Zumach & Portillo, 2020). The emergence of student-created content is especially significant, shifting the dynamic from instructor-driven delivery to a participatory model that empowers learners and deepens their engagement (Barney & Bunda, 2024).

Although the literature is abundant with integration of podcasts into higher education curricula, Artificial Intelligence (AI) - generated podcasts have recently been used in education industry thus only a handful of works focused on investigating the impact of AI generated podcasts, while the business education focus is still lacking in the recent literature. For instance, Chaikovska et al. (2024) found that AI-based podcast listening activities undertaken by engineering students outside the classroom significantly enhance their listening comprehension skills, while also fostering curiosity and motivating them toward further personal and academic development (Chaikovska et al., 2024).

Moreover, Lydia Kilz's (2024) study explores how students perceive the use of AI in higher education through an analysis of podcasts created during a Virtual Collaborative Learning course. The qualitative findings reveal that students view AI tools as helpful for enhancing learning efficiency and personalization, particularly for tasks like text improvement. However, they also express concerns about overreliance on AI, emphasizing the importance of human

interaction, ethical use, and maintaining critical thinking. The study highlights the need for a balanced integration of AI that supports autonomy and intellectual engagement in academic settings.

Furthermore, Hobson and McGinnis (2023) investigate the use of AI-generated podcasts as a pedagogical tool in media education, focusing on how such technology can enhance student engagement and creativity. Using a qualitative case study method, the researchers analyzed reflections from a cohort of 12 undergraduate media students who created podcasts with AI voice synthesis and content structuring tools. The project allowed students to concentrate on scripting and conceptual development while interacting with emerging media technologies. Findings revealed that students experienced increased motivation, deeper learning, and greater creative confidence, suggesting that AI tools can democratize media production and enrich educational practices.

In another work, Trevor Brown's chapter, *No Podcast Ever Gets Made*, presents a qualitative case study exploring human-AI collaboration in storytelling podcast production. Using AI tools like large language models for scriptwriting, ElevenLabs for voice synthesis, and Ableton Live for sound design, Brown documents the creative process of developing a single podcast episode. The study highlights both the potential and limitations of AI in creative audio work, emphasizing that while AI can assist with technical and generative tasks, human input remains essential for emotional depth and narrative coherence. The title reflects the paradox that despite technological advances, meaningful podcast creation still demands human artistry.

Moreover, Lee et al. (2024) focuses on exploring how AI-generated podcasts can support older adults in learning about artificial intelligence. Using a co-creation methodology, researchers collaborated with 14 older adults over a series of workshops to design and evaluate podcast content tailored to their interests and needs. The podcasts were generated using AI tools and refined through participant feedback. Key findings reveal that older adults appreciated the conversational and narrative style of AI podcasts, which helped demystify complex AI concepts and fostered engagement. The study underscores the value of participatory design in making emerging technologies more accessible to aging populations.

In another study from nursing education, Desmedt et al. (2025) focuses on evaluating the effectiveness of an AI-generated podcast as a tool to enhance patient education and reduce anxiety among individuals with heart failure. Conducted as a randomized controlled trial, the researchers enrolled 100 patients who were divided into two groups: one received standard care, while the other accessed an AI-generated podcast tailored to heart failure education. The podcast was developed using natural language processing and machine learning techniques to deliver personalized, engaging content. The key finding revealed that patients who listened to the AI podcast showed significantly improved knowledge about their condition and experienced reduced anxiety levels compared to the control group.

Furthermore, Smith (2023) investigated the educational potential of AI-generated podcasts in higher education, focusing on their impact on student engagement and learning outcomes. Using a mixed-methods approach with surveys and interviews involving 60 participants, the study compares podcast-based learning to traditional reading materials. AI-generated podcasts were created using text-to-speech and summarization tools. Findings suggest that while podcasts enhance engagement, especially auditory learners, they do not significantly outperform traditional formats in comprehension or retention.

In summary, podcasts offer a dynamic, accessible, and effective tool for self-guided learning in business education. Nonetheless, further investigation is needed to measure their impact precisely and to refine best practices for their use. As education continues to evolve, podcasts are poised to play an influential role in shaping how business knowledge is delivered and absorbed.

### **3. Methods**

#### **3.1 Study Design**

An undergraduate-level business analytics class was used for this investigation. This course consists of comprehension-oriented and application-oriented assessments. Quizzes, midterm and final exams were comprehension-oriented assignments, where multiple choice, true-false, and essay type of questions were used. On the other hand, weekly homework assignments and term projects require practical application of analytics methods. The course is being offered in both online-asynchronous and on-ground (in person) modalities. Historically, students

enrolled in online sections seem to have lower engagement due to the asynchronous (no live lectures) format and the abstract concepts covered in the course such as optimization, simulation, statistical analysis, etc. To increase course engagement and overall course performance, AI-generated podcasts were developed and offered to students, accompanied by a quiz study guide summarizing topics covered and offering study tips. Quiz assignments served as the focal point of this paper, where students are typically given a set of 10 to 15 randomly drawn questions from a test bank. Students were given 2 attempts per quiz, where the final quiz score was the average of both attempts if the 2<sup>nd</sup> attempt was taken. The primary objective was to assess how AI-generated podcasts impacts students' academic performance and course engagement in the online learning environment.

We employed a mixed methods approach. Quantitatively, we compared quiz performance across students who had listened to the podcasts and/or used study guide versus those who did not within the same class. The quizzes included a question asking whether a student listened to the podcast (without point incentives) and reviewed the study guide to be used in statistical comparison (Mann Whitney U Test). Additionally, another online section was used as a control group, where students took the same quizzes but were not offered podcasts nor study guides. Secondly, we administered a post-course survey (via Qualtrics) in Week 7 (online modality) and conducted voluntary interviews to explore student perceptions of AI podcasts, patterns of use, engagement, and suggestions for improvement. The combined methods intend to shed light on both the effect of size and the mechanisms of impact. The intervention section (where AI podcasts were integrated) included 26 students, while the control section (without AI podcasts) consisted of 28 students.

### 3.2 AI Podcast Generation

Although many platforms can generate AI podcasts, researchers in this study chose Google's NotebookLM, a Gemini 2.0 powered research and writing assistant. The selection was driven primarily by its ease of use, availability of a free version, and speed of podcast generation. As shown in the flow chart below (Fig. 1), the process begins by visiting [notebooklm.google.com](https://notebooklm.google.com) and signing in with a Google account. Users then create a new notebook and upload their sources, which may include PDFs, websites, YouTube videos, audio files, Google Docs, text files, or Google Slides. In our application, the entire pool of quiz questions and answers were provided along with the detailed chapter slides as the main resource prior to podcast generation.

After uploading the resource documents, users can engage with their sources through the Chat Panel by asking questions or generating summaries, or move directly to the NotebookLM Studio, which offers several output options such as interactive or non-interactive podcasts, mind maps, video overviews, reports, flashcards, and quizzes. The final step is to save and share the selected materials with students, enabling a seamless and interactive learning experience.

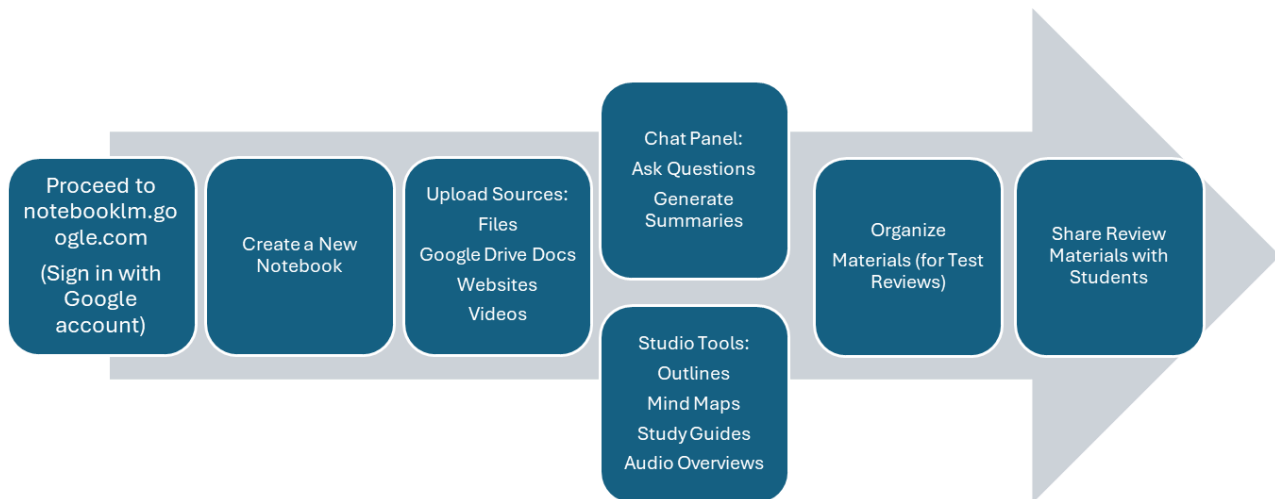


Figure 1. Podcast Generation with NotebookLM

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Statistical Analysis

Initially, the lead investigator conducted a normality check of the quiz performance (grades) data by groups (whether a student reviewed the study guide before and whether a student listened to the podcast). Grades were previously normalized between 0 and 1. Weekly quizzes were assigned. 6-week quiz data was collected for statistical analysis and comparison. Depending on the normality check results, a parametric or non-parametric statistical comparison would be conducted. Histograms of quiz performance results by groups are provided in Figure 2, and results of normality check conducted with Shapiro Wilk test are provided in Table 1. Both visual (Fig. 2) and statistical (Table 1) results indicate that the quiz grades data is partially non-normal. Therefore, Mann Whitney U test was used to conduct statistical comparisons within the intervention section. Furthermore, to compare the intervention (AI podcast integrated section) with the control group (no podcast was used), paired t-test (parametric) and Wilcoxon (nonparametric) tests were conducted.

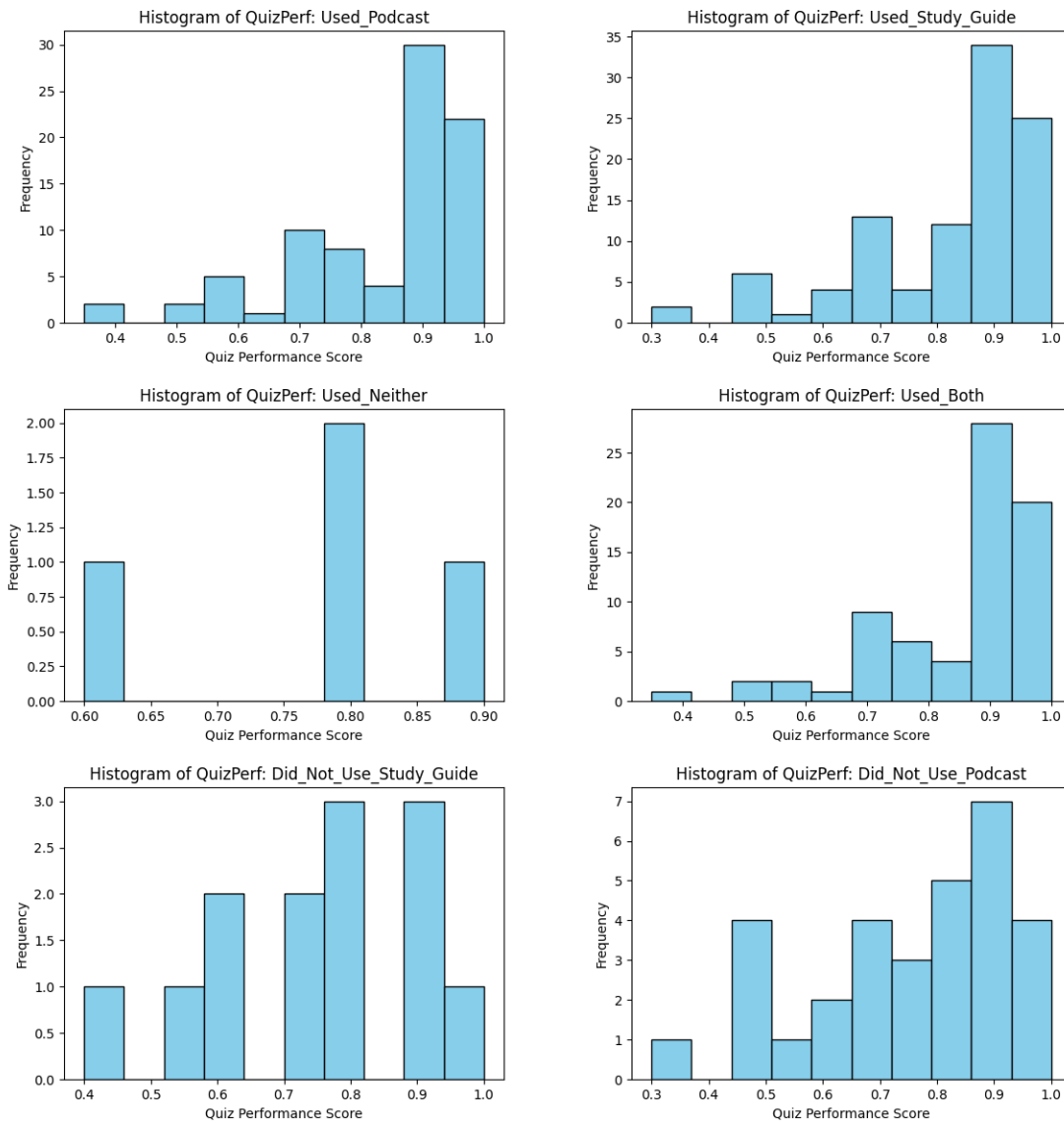


Figure 2. Normality Check (Histograms of Quiz performance (0,1))

**Table 1. Normality Check (Shapiro Wilk Test)**

Group	Statistic	p-value	Sample Size	Normality Conclusion
Used Study Guide	0.8614	2.84e-08	101	Not normal
Did Not Use Study Guide	0.9524	0.0636	13	Normal
Used Podcast	0.8503	9.64e-08	84	Not normal
Did Not Use Podcast	0.9389	0.0753	31	Normal
Used Both Study Guide & Podcast	0.8329	1.28e-07	73	Not normal
Used Neither	0.8949	0.4066	4	Normal (small n)

**4.1.1 Statistical Comparison within the course**

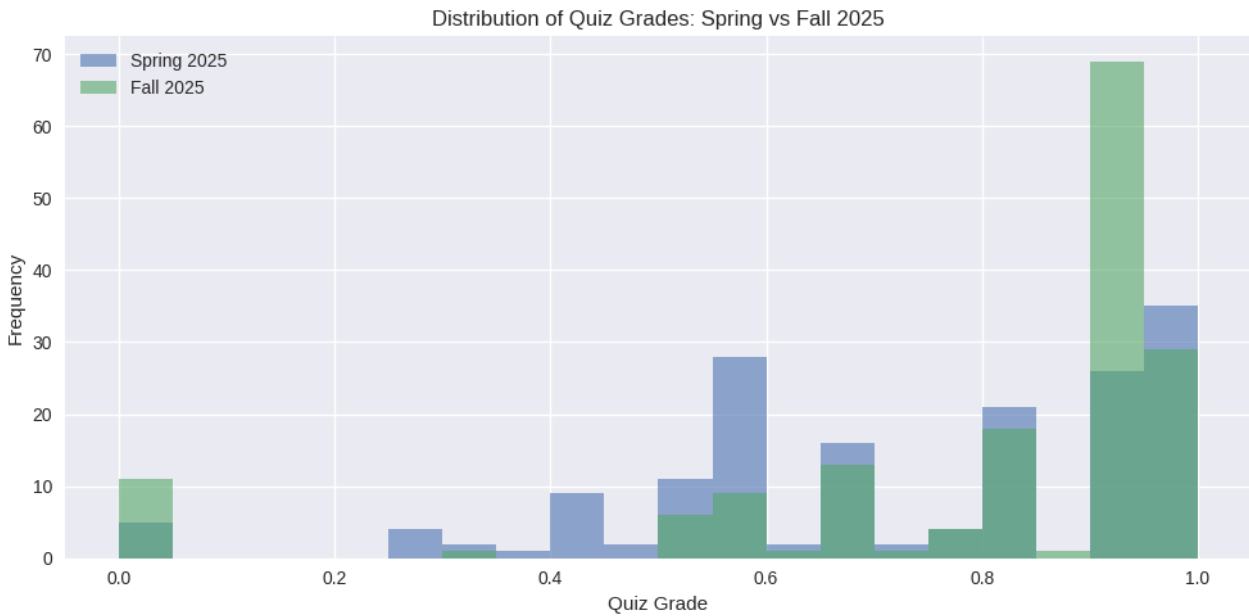
Within the intervention section, students were grouped based on whether they used the study guide before taking the quiz, listened to the podcast before the quiz, or used both the study guide and the podcast. Among these groups, students who listened to the podcast performed significantly better on the quizzes than those who did not (See Table 2).

**Table 2. Statistical Comparison of Podcast and Study Guide’s Impact**

Comparison Group	Test Type	Statistic	p-value	Significance
Study Guide Usage vs. No Study Guide	Mann-Whitney U test	868.5000	0.0536	Not significant
Podcast Usage vs. No Podcast	Mann-Whitney U test	1719.0000	0.0072	Statistically significant
Both Study Guide & Podcast vs. Neither	Mann-Whitney U test	212.5000	0.1167	Not significant

**4.1.2 Statistical Comparison against a previous section**

Additionally, a prior section of the same course which was taught in Spring I 2025 was used as a control group, and compared statistically with the intervention group (the section which was taught in Fall I 2025). Results of quiz performance (grades) were visually depicted in Figure 3 as well as the statistical comparison results were summarized in Table 3. Even though the intervention group (AI podcast use) yielded higher quiz scores, the difference was found to be statistically insignificant (See Table 3) in both Paired t-test and Wilcoxon tests. It is important to note that the intervention group included 26 students, and the control group included 28, resulting in a relatively small sample size.



**Figure 3. Graphical Comparison of Fall 2025 (Intervention with AI Podcast) vs. Spring 2025 (Control) Cohort**

**Table 3. Statistical Comparison of Fall 2025 (Intervention) vs. Spring 2025 (Control) Cohorts**

Quiz ID	Paired t-test Statistic	Paired t-test p-value	Wilcoxon Statistic	Wilcoxon p-value	Significant Difference
Q1	-0.3589	0.7227	142.0	0.5808	No
Q2	-1.0713	0.2951	73.0	0.0822	No
Q3	-0.1517	0.8809	101.0	0.8810	No
Q4	-1.0458	0.3088	54.0	0.2861	No
Q5	-0.9057	0.3777	47.5	0.2881	No
Q6	0.0000	1.0000	57.0	0.8644	No

## 4.2 Survey (n=17 students)

### 4.2.1 Quantitative Analysis

#### Demographic Trends

In terms of majors, the most common was Business Administration (41%), followed by Accounting (18%). All in all, there was a diverse representation across 9 majors including Data Science, Sport Management, and Economics.

In terms of Academic Year Classification: Seniors (41%) and Juniors (29%) made up the majority. Freshmen were the least represented (6%).

Prior Podcast Use: Mirrors academic year distribution, suggesting prior exposure increases with academic progression.

Familiarity with AI-generated content: 65% had moderate to very high familiarity and only 6% were not familiar at all.

Race/Ethnicity: Predominantly White or Caucasian (76%). Minority representation included Asian, Black or African American, and American Indian/Native American (each 6%).

Gender Identity: Male (47%), Female (41%), Non-binary/Third gender (6%).

Age Group: Majority ranged 18–24 (65%). The remaining respondents spanned 25–64, indicating a mix of traditional and non-traditional students.

#### Podcast Usage:

In terms of listening frequency, 53% listened most weeks or every week, 29% rarely or occasionally listened, while 12% never listened.

Average listening time: 41% spent 10–20 minutes. 18% spent >30 minutes. 18% spent <10 minutes. 6% preferred not to say.

#### Academic Performance:

Preparedness for quizzes: 47% felt more prepared (Somewhat or Strongly agree); 29% were neutral, while 24% disagreed.

Improved quiz performance: 59% agreed podcasts helped, 29% were neutral, and 12% disagreed.

Understanding chapter concepts: 59% agreed, 29% neutral, 12% disagreed.

Retention of key concepts: 71% agreed, 24% neutral, 6% disagreed.

Compared to traditional study methods, 53% found podcasts more effective; 35% said they were about the same, while 6% found them less effective.

Course Engagement: Most students found the AI-generated podcasts beneficial for engagement. About 71% said the podcasts made the material more engaging, and 65% felt more motivated to study after listening. Additionally, 56% would recommend using podcasts in other courses, though a third remained neutral, while a small minority expressed disagreement.

#### **4.2.2 Qualitative Analysis**

**Convenience & Flexibility:** Many appreciated being able to listen during commutes, work hours, or walks. Podcasts offered a way to study when traditional methods weren't feasible.

**Engagement & Variety:** Students found the format refreshing and more interactive than reading notes or slides. The audio format made learning feel more dynamic and enjoyable.

**Content Quality & Relevance:** Podcasts were praised for summarizing key chapter topics effectively. Their timing, being available before quizzes, was especially helpful.

**Ease of Use:** The simplicity and accessibility of the podcasts made them a practical study tool.

**Mixed Usage:** A few students noted they didn't fully engage with the podcasts or didn't use them at all.

#### **4.3 Interviews**

In an interview conducted via Microsoft Teams, a total of 15 structured questions were discussed to explore student perceptions of AI-generated podcasts. The responses highlighted that the podcasts were clear, concise, and effective in supporting understanding complex topics such as regression analysis. The interviewee noted that listening to episodes before quizzes improved confidence and performance, and that the flexibility to listen while commuting or multitasking made learning more accessible and less burdensome. The podcasts were described as helping to strengthen connection with the course material and encouraging greater engagement in class discussions. While the overall format and structure were seen as focused and easy to follow, it was suggested that adding short, real-world examples could make future episodes even more engaging and relevant. Overall, the podcasts were regarded as a valuable and motivating supplement to traditional learning materials.

### **5. Conclusion & Future Remarks**

This study explored the use of AI-generated podcasts in fields that place heavy emphasis on both concepts and quantitative analysis. It addressed gaps in the current research while offering practical guidance for instructors who may want to incorporate audio supplements into their teaching. By looking specifically at business analytics and other similar disciplines, the study highlighted how generative tools can support learning in higher education. The findings of this study can guide recommendations on when and how these tools are most useful, and for which groups of students they may work best. As a future work, the study's sample size is limited; therefore, it will be expanded to have at least 30 students' sample size in both control and intervention groups. Moreover, the AI podcasts were integrated into the asynchronous online section. It will be integrated into the on-ground sections, and experiments will be repeated. Lastly, other podcast generation platforms along with more resources could be used to implement innovative, student-friendly, engaging pedagogical approaches in business education.

#### **Ethics Declaration**

The necessary IRB process was conducted prior to survey distribution and IRB approval was obtained on October 13, 2025.

#### **AI Declaration**

Generative AI (MS CoPilot & ChatGPT OpenAI) was used to summarize the interview transcripts and generate Figure 1. Furthermore, SciteAI was used to collect relevant papers in literature review. Grammarly, an AI-powered writing tool, was used to enhance clarity, flow, and overall language quality of the work. All references were individually checked and verified during the preparation of literature review.

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