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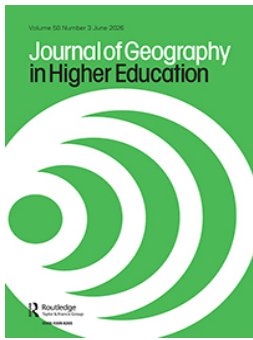
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Harry West & Alan Marvell

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Exploring the use of generative AI podcasts to support students learning

Harry West ^a and Alan Marvell^b

^aSchool of Architecture and Environment, University of the West of England, Bristol, UK; ^bSchool of Business, Computing and Social Sciences, University of Gloucestershire, Gloucester, UK

ABSTRACT

Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) is transforming higher education pedagogy, through increased use, curriculum design and engagement. While it can enhance geographical thinking and spatial analysis, concerns exist about superficial learning and effectiveness. This paper examines the pedagogical value of GenAI-generated audio resources, presenting a case study from a second-year undergraduate geography module in a UK university, "Climate Change: Challenges for the 21st Century," where JellyPod was used to turn lecture slides into short podcasts. A survey with 45 students found that 90% believed the podcasts improved learning, citing clarity, brevity, and the ability to distil complex topics. The podcasts accessibility and flexibility were praised, with 92% integrating them into routines for independent learning. However, 47% noted the AI voice was "robotic" or "monotone," and that some content was superficial and lacked interactivity. Overall, GenAI podcasts are effective, scalable tools for reinforcing content, but future improvements should focus on voice realism, interactivity, and personalisation to promote inclusive, student-centred geography education.

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Introduction

Generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) is rapidly transforming pedagogical practice across higher education, redefining how students and educators engage with learning, assessment, and disciplinary inquiry. Within geography, these transformations are particularly visible, as GenAI begins to influence curriculum design, teaching practices, and modes of student engagement in both lectures and independent study (Lee et al., 2025). As large language models (LLMs) and multi-modal AI systems and tools become increasingly embedded in daily life and academic workflows, educators are exploring how such technologies can complement and enhance teaching, learning and assessment practices (Sozon et al., 2025).

In the context of geography, GenAI has the potential to enhance various dimensions of teaching and learning. These include the analysis of geographical processes, spatial data analysis, and the cultivation of geographical thinking more broadly (Lee et al., 2025). Moreover, AI tools are beginning to play a role in fieldwork and in the creation of virtual or augmented learning environments that extend the boundaries of traditional classroom-based instruction (Lee et al., 2025). The capacity of GenAI to generate, summarise, and visualise complex data offers students new ways to approach geospatial analysis and interpretation. By lowering the technical barriers associated with complex software and data manipulation, AI can help students focus more deeply on interpretation and critical engagement, rather than on procedural execution (Redican et al., 2024).

The opportunities presented by GenAI extend beyond technical facilitation. Through adaptive and responsive tools and algorithms, educators and students can now design learning resources and personalised pathways. Such resources may foster autonomous learning and have the potential to strengthen both social and cognitive presence in online and blended learning environments (Anderson et al., 2025). In this sense, GenAI has the potential to play a constructive role in promoting engagement, reflection, and inclusivity within the geography classroom.

However, the integration of GenAI also introduces a set of pedagogical and ethical challenges. Current AI systems lack the capacity to replicate the affective and interpersonal dimensions of

CONTACT Harry West  Harry.West@uwe.ac.uk  School of Architecture and Environment, University of the West of England, Bristol BS16 1QY, UK

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teaching, such as empathy, encouragement, and nuanced feedback that arises through peer-to-peer and student-staff discussion (Chan & Lee, 2023). Moreover, LLMs tend to produce what Chang and Kidman (2023) describe as “safe answers” - responses that are coherent but often superficial and constrained by probabilistic prediction rather than genuine understanding, as meaning is ultimately applied by the human interpreter (Lane, 2025). Overreliance on GenAI also risks encouraging students to bypass fundamental aspects of enquiry, including methodological rigour, critical reflection, and engagement with academic communities (Cavazos et al., 2025; Sallai et al., 2024; Shafei & Ahmed, 2025). The practical and ethical adoption of GenAI in higher education also depends not only on student literacy but also on the digital competence of educators and the institutional capacity to provide ongoing staff training and pedagogical support for innovation (Sozon et al., 2025).

Nevertheless, there is increasing scope for both students and staff to deploy GenAI in creating new tailored/personalised resources to support learning. Studies suggest that LLMs can generate educational content at a level comparable to that produced by students themselves (Denny et al., 2023). In practice, tools like Google’s NotebookLM allow users to upload course documents and derive study guides, quizzes, summaries, and audio-based podcast-style discussions (Yeo et al., 2025). There is potential that such AI tools might represent a meaningful shift in how students engage with and even generate their own learning resources that better align with their preferred learning styles and requirements, life schedules, or disciplinary needs (Lane, 2025). A study of GenAI medical podcasts revealed that they were suitable for general use, but some contained inaccuracies and mispronunciations. However, the idea that GenAI can summarise key findings in an easily understandable and engaging manner is a particular strength (Desmedt et al., 2025).

Podcasts have become an increasingly prominent medium of communication, knowledge exchange, and education over the past decade (Kenna, 2022). However, their use remains underdeveloped among geographers (Scriven, 2022). Their accessibility, portability, and informal tone make them particularly appealing within higher education to support learning, where students balance increasingly complex schedules and diverse learning needs. As an audio-based resource, podcasts extend learning beyond traditional settings of lectures, seminars, and textbooks, offering an engaging and flexible complement to existing learning materials.

Research within geography has shown that podcasts can promote active learning and deepen student engagement with course content (Hill & Nelson, 2011; Hill et al., 2012). Their asynchronous nature allows learners to access materials at a time and place of their choosing, encouraging self-directed learning and enhancing inclusivity. Hill et al. (2012) found that students valued the ability to listen to educational podcasts whenever and wherever convenient, on laptops, mobile devices, or while commuting. Students also often revisited these resources for revision or to reinforce lecture content. Podcasts were particularly effective for supporting factual recall, summarising key ideas, and consolidating complex concepts in preparation for assessment (Hill et al., 2012).

Podcasts also provide variety and novelty in the types of media used to support learning, which can help sustain motivation and engagement. The conversational format of many podcasts fosters a sense of immediacy and authenticity, making academic content more relatable and accessible. This aligns with pedagogical approaches that emphasise multimodal learning and the integration of informal, student-centred media into curriculum design.

Current literature on educational podcasting also explores student-produced podcasts, which are often framed as tools for assessment, creativity, and communication (Kemp et al., 2012; McMaster et al., 2025). In these contexts, podcast production is used to encourage reflection, collaboration, and knowledge (co-) construction.

While the studies cited above highlight the pedagogical value of podcasts, there remains comparatively limited research into the use of AI-generated podcasts to support students learning. As educational technologies evolve, this gap presents an opportunity to explore how GenAI podcasts might further personalise and enhance learning. As Hill and Nelson (2011) originally questioned in relation to educational podcasts in supporting teaching and learning in geography, does this new technology offer opportunities for new pedagogies?

Case study context

In this *JGHE Resources* paper, we present an example of how GenAI has been employed to produce supplementary podcasts that support student learning within a higher education geography context. This study is situated within a second-year semester-long undergraduate module titled “*Climate Change: Challenges for the 21st Century*”. The module is taken by physical geography and environmental management students at a large teaching-oriented university in the UK. This module examines the complex and interrelated impacts of climate change on the Earth system, including topics such as climate modelling and projections, tipping points, and the increasing frequency and severity of extreme weather events. The content is conceptually, and at times emotionally, challenging for students, encompassing both the scientific mechanisms underpinning climate processes and their intersections with socio-economic and geopolitical issues.

Traditionally, the module has been delivered through an established lecture-based format, in which core concepts are introduced via lectures that incorporate relevant case studies and follow-up activities promote engagement and applied understanding. As part of a series of post-lecture activities for students, we explored the use of GenAI to produce concise, accessible, and supplementary podcasts designed to reinforce understanding of the weekly topic.

The podcasts were produced using JellyPod, a GenAI application that converts uploaded materials into spoken audio summaries, usually with two discussants. As with many AI-platforms JellyPod offers both a standard free version, and a paid subscription that allows for higher generation volumes and greater functionality. The podcasts for this research were generated using the standard free version. Lecture slide decks were uploaded to the JellyPod platform, which generated podcast scripts and audio recordings. Importantly, no additional AI-generated content was introduced (although the platform does have this functionality through an LLM like ChatGPT). The podcasts were created solely from the uploaded lecture materials to ensure they stay true to the module content. The platform also permitted post-generation editing, allowing the instructor to correct any inaccuracies, particularly concerning specialised terminology and complex climate science concepts (a limitation of the aforementioned Google NotebookLM option for podcast generation). The final weekly podcasts each ranged between approximately 15 to 25 minutes long.

Each week, following the scheduled in-person lecture, students were provided with two learning resources: a traditional lecture recording captured during the live session and the short supplementary AI-generated podcast that recapped the main themes and concepts. These were both delivered to students via the modules VLE. The intention of these short podcasts was to offer students an additional, low-barrier medium through which to revisit key content and support revision. This was communicated to the students at the start of the module and throughout the term when the podcasts were discussed.

At the conclusion of the module, an evaluative survey was conducted with a sample of 45 students, drawn from two student cohorts during the 2024–25 academic year, to assess the effectiveness and perceived value of the GenAI podcasts in supporting student learning in this context. Most questions were structured for students to initially complete a Likert-scale response (for example, whether they agreed with a statement regarding the AI-generated podcasts), which was then followed by an open-text question prompting them to explain their response. This approach of offering both a standardised scoring response and open explanatory text enabled a greater understanding of perceptions and use of the AI-generated podcasts among students.

Student feedback on the benefits of GenAI podcasts

Student feedback on the use of AI-generated podcasts was overwhelmingly positive. Survey results demonstrated that 90% of students agreed that the AI podcasts enhanced their learning, suggesting that the approach was both pedagogically effective and well received. Most respondents reported that the podcasts successfully summarised key lecture points, clarified difficult concepts, and helped correct misunderstandings that had arisen during or after lectures. Overall, students consistently rated the podcasts as “helpful” or “very helpful” in assisting them to consolidate and review core material.

A recurrent theme in student feedback was the brevity and focus of the podcasts. Students contrasted these AI-generated resources with traditional lecture recordings (i.e. recordings of in-person sessions where

the focus is lecture delivery), highlighting their conciseness and greater engagement value. As one student noted, the podcasts were “*straight to the point and linked with the lectures,*” while others described them as “*short and easy to digest*” and a “*good way to check understanding after the lecture*”. These comments highlight the effectiveness of the podcasts in distilling complex lecture material into manageable, targeted recaps that could be consumed quickly and conveniently. Almost all students (92%) felt that the podcast length was “just right,” which appears to have contributed to their perceived usefulness. By offering compact, high-value content, the AI-generated podcasts made learning more approachable and less cognitively demanding and time consuming for students than revisiting full-length lecture recordings.

Accessibility and flexibility were also central to their appeal. Students emphasised that the podcasts fitted seamlessly into their study schedules, with 92% agreeing that they could be easily integrated into their daily routines. A student commented how the podcasts were “*more time efficient*” than traditional recordings of lectures for recapping key points, and many reported listening while commuting, exercising, or performing other tasks, reflecting the adaptability of audio-based learning. This pattern mirrors earlier findings from Hill et al. (2012), who noted that students value podcasts for their capacity to support learning in non-traditional contexts and to complement existing study habits and routines.

Collectively, these results highlight the potential of AI-generated podcasts to promote independent and flexible learning. Their concise structure and on-demand accessibility appear to encourage ongoing interaction with course materials, supporting both knowledge comprehension and retention. Moreover, the positive response suggests that AI podcasting can effectively enhance engagement and learning satisfaction by supplementing existing resources and delivery modes.

Student feedback on the current limitations of GenAI podcasts

While student feedback on the use of AI-generated podcasts was broadly positive, several important limitations were also identified. Just under half of the surveyed students (47%) commented on the unnatural or emotionless quality of the AI voice. Descriptions such as “*robotic*”, “*monotone*” and “*unengaging*” captured a common perception that, although functional, the delivery lacked the emotion and dynamism of human narration and discussion. This perceived artificiality occasionally reduced engagement and made listening for extended periods less appealing. A student further commented how “*the lecture notes and recorded lectures are more engaging as you hear the lecturers voice*” and the AI voice was “*a bit strange in how it tries to simulate human emotion / expression*”. Such findings underline an ongoing challenge in the adoption of GenAI audio tools. Whilst the technology can rapidly produce accurate summaries, it has yet to convincingly replicate the expressiveness, tone, and spontaneity that characterise effective (and affective) human teaching and interaction. That said, the financial cost and workload involved if the module team were to produce similar quality podcasts would be significantly higher than the AI-generated resources. This, therefore, naturally raises an important question for educators in relation to time and cost efficiencies gained through leveraging AI and balancing this against the benefits of human interaction.

Another key limitation concerned the one-directional and exclusively verbal nature of the podcasts. Students noted that, unlike lectures or seminars, the AI-produced recordings did not allow for interaction, clarification, or visual reinforcement of the content being discussed.

Although many students indicated that the length of the podcasts was appropriate, several respondents suggested “*the podcasts didn’t always cover all of the topics in the lecture or go to the necessary detail for the assessment*”. This tension between brevity and comprehensiveness reflects a broader pedagogical trade-off: shorter, more accessible resources enhance engagement, but can risk oversimplification of complex material. In reflecting on the module delivery, there might also be additional discussion points with students, highlighting that the podcasts are supplementary resources for brief recapping of key content rather than in-depth explorations of the weekly topic. This would likely help in managing expectations regarding depth and detail.

These observations resonate with earlier findings by Hill et al. (2012), who reported that while traditional educational podcasts are valuable for recalling information, they are less effective in fostering higher-order cognitive engagement, such as critical analysis or application. Without complementary opportunities for discussion or reflection, podcasts (both human and GenAI produced) risk promoting surface learning rather than deep understanding. In this work, students generally viewed the AI-generated podcasts as

a supportive supplement rather than a substitute for lectures/seminars. This perception aligns with the view that podcasts should function as part of a multi-modal and supportive learning ecosystem, rather than as a stand-alone teaching tool.

Future AI-Podcast enhancements

In the survey, students also made several suggestions for how the AI-generated podcasts could be improved as the technology continues to evolve. One immediate area of improvement lies in voice quality and delivery. Enhancing the naturalness and expressiveness of AI-generated speech would help overcome one of the limitations identified by students – its robotic or monotonous voice and delivery style. Advances in GenAI models already suggest that more human-like, emotionally nuanced narration may soon become standard, potentially increasing listener engagement and perceived authenticity.

A second area concerns content depth. Future iterations of AI-generated podcasts could move beyond concise summaries toward richer, more discursive treatments of key ideas, offering greater nuance and context. This would help address concerns that current outputs prioritise brevity at the expense of deeper conceptual understanding. Integrating interactive and visual elements could also enhance learning outcomes. The addition of embedded quizzes, self-check prompts, dialogue with AI, or linked visualisations (i.e. creating “vodcast” style resources) were identified as a desirable enhancement, echoing some of the strengths of the earlier podcasts discussed by Hill et al. (2012).

Finally, personalisation represents one of the most promising future directions. Allowing students to tailor podcast length, level of detail, and delivery style to suit individual learning preferences could align AI-generated resources more closely with principles of adaptive learning. As Hill et al. (2012) emphasised, effective design should promote “guided autonomy” – a balance between self-paced learning and structured, tutor-supported engagement. Implementing such flexibility within GenAI tools could enable podcasts to evolve from static recaps into dynamic, learner-centred companions that respond to diverse study habits and disciplinary needs.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have demonstrated the potential of GenAI to enhance student learning through the production of concise, accessible, and flexible podcast resources. Based on student evaluations of early work adopting these as part of module delivery, we found that AI-generated podcasts provided effective supplementary support that students valued for clarity, brevity, and convenience. This suggests that such GenAI tools can improve engagement and comprehension, particularly when used to reinforce complex material in conjunction with traditional teaching modes and methods.

Nevertheless, limitations remain, most notably the lack of emotional tone, limited interactivity, and occasional superficiality of content. These findings align with broader literature emphasising that podcasts are best deployed as complementary learning supports rather than replacements for classroom-based delivery and support. Future innovations in voice realism, interactivity, and personalisation could help bridge these gaps, transforming AI-generated audio from a passive resource into a more dynamic and adaptive learning medium.

Overall, the development of GenAI podcast production represents a promising, scalable approach to supporting independent and flexible learning. When thoughtfully embedded within a pedagogically grounded framework, AI-generated podcasts can play a meaningful role in extending student engagement with subject content and promoting inclusivity and accessibility.

The integration of GenAI podcasts into geography teaching offers the potential to enrich higher education learning and instruction. By facilitating the creation of adaptive, flexible, accessible, and contextually appropriate audio learning resources, GenAI can support adaptive learning and increase participation. Its ability to generate engaging, narrative-rich representations of complex spatial processes and contemporary geographical issues can improve students conceptual understanding and critical thinking. AI-assisted podcasts can also be used as a form of student-led assessment, encouraging creativity, reflection, and digital literacy. As an (increasingly) scalable and adaptable pedagogical tool, GenAI podcasts deserve

further exploration for their role in promoting inclusive, student-centred approaches within geography curricula.

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ORCID

Harry West  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2704-5474>

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