

The Open Educational Podcast in Spain: production structures, hosting models, and discursive dynamics

O Podcast Educacional Aberto na Espanha: estruturas de produção, modelos de apresentação e dinâmicas discursivas

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ABSTRACT: This exploratory study examines a curated set of influential contemporary educational podcasts in Spain to identify emerging patterns in production structures, hosting models, and discursive strategies. Drawing on genre theory, audience studies, and platform analysis, the article conceptualizes educational podcasting as a hybrid communicative ecosystem shaped by narrative experimentation, pedagogical intent, and algorithmic circulation. Data from major audio platforms were analyzed using a mixed-method coding protocol integrating formal, discursive, and platform variables. Findings reveal uneven professionalization, diverse pedagogical voices, and adaptive strategies for visibility in platform-mediated environments. The study contributes a theoretically grounded overview of Spain's evolving educational podcast landscape.

Keywords: educational podcast; discursive genres; platformization; audiences; informal learning.

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RESUMO: Este estudo exploratório analisa um conjunto selecionado de podcasts educacionais contemporâneos influentes na Espanha com o objetivo de identificar padrões emergentes nas estruturas de produção, nos modelos de apresentação e nas estratégias discursivas. Com base na teoria dos gêneros, nos estudos de audiência e na análise de plataformas, o artigo conceitua o podcast educacional como um ecossistema comunicacional híbrido, moldado pela experimentação narrativa, pela intencionalidade pedagógica e pela circulação algorítmica. Dados provenientes das principais plataformas de áudio foram examinados por meio de um protocolo de codificação de métodos mistos que integra variáveis formais, discursivas e de circulação em plataformas. Os resultados revelam profissionalização desigual, diversidade de vozes pedagógicas e estratégias adaptativas de visibilidade em ambientes mediados por plataformas. O estudo oferece uma visão geral teoricamente fundamentada do panorama em transformação dos podcasts educacionais na Espanha.

Palavras-chave: podcast educacional; gêneros discursivos; plataformização; audiências; aprendizagem informal.

Introduction

Over the past decade, podcasting has transitioned from a niche format associated with early Web 2.0 culture into a consolidated component of contemporary digital media ecosystems (BERRY, 2016; SPINELLI; DANN, 2019). This growth has been driven by accessible production tools, diversified distribution platforms, and shifting media consumption habits. Globally, podcasting functions as a flexible, mobile-native medium, supporting diverse genres and educational uses (BONINI, 2015a; LLINARES; FOX; BERRY, 2018). Its portability and asynchronous listening have positioned audio as a key site of innovation in entertainment and learning.

In Spain, podcasting has expanded rapidly alongside broadband access, smartphone adoption, and the professionalization of digital media industries. Educational podcasting has emerged as a prominent field, involving universities, research groups and independent educators producing content for professional development, informal learning, and public engagement. Growth accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic, as remote education increased demand for accessible audio resources (AMOEDO *et al.*, 2023), contributing to a diverse ecosystem of independent creators, media organizations, and institutions.

Within this context, educational podcasting has gained relevance as a tool for pedagogical innovation. Low production barriers and the narrative qualities of audio support multiple learning practices, from formal instruction and teacher training to lifelong learning and autonomous knowledge exploration (ABT; BARRY, 2007; SOLANO FERNÁNDEZ; SÁNCHEZ VERA, 2010). Research has shown that podcasting enhances cognitive engagement, reflective listening, and learner autonomy, making it particularly suitable for hybrid and informal education.

Despite this expansion, systematic analyses of Spain's educational podcast ecosystem remain scarce, underscoring the need for theoretically informed studies of its structures, discourses, and circulation dynamics. Existing research tends to focus on specific pedagogical uses or individual

programs, leaving broader questions about the ecosystem's genres and communicative logics underexplored. Addressing this gap, the present article offers an exploratory mapping of influential Spanish-language educational podcasts, situating their production structures, hosting models, and discursive strategies within key theoretical debates on genre, audience activity, and platform-mediated circulation. This approach documents the diversity of practices while identifying the sociotechnical conditions shaping educational podcasting in Spain today.

Theoretical framework

Understanding the educational podcast as a communicative object requires a theoretical articulation capable of integrating discursive forms, audience practices, and the circulation dynamics of digital platforms. This study assumes that the podcast is not merely a technical support or a stable media format, but rather a hybrid communicative environment shaped simultaneously by language, technology, and culture (SCOLARI, 2012). Three theoretical traditions therefore guide the analytical approach.

The first tradition draws from discursive genre theory. Following Bakhtin's (1986) notion that every utterance is organized through genres that are relatively stable yet open to transformation, the podcast emerges as a privileged space for discursive experimentation. The convergence of narrative, conversational, journalistic, and pedagogical modes produces hybrid forms that challenge conventional classifications and establish new communicative contracts between producers and listeners. Charaudeau (2003) reinforces this view by arguing that genres are not merely formal structures but implicit agreements regarding expectations, roles, and meaning effects. Recent scholarship on podcasting (LLINARES; FOX; BERRY, 2018; LINDGREN; LOVIGLIO, 2022) demonstrates that this discursive hybridity is one of the defining features of podcast language, enabling educational productions that blend intellectual authority with sonic intimacy and engaging storytelling.

The second theoretical strand derives from audience and reception studies. Although podcasts might appear to operate as a unidirectional

medium, their everyday appropriation reveals listening practices that are deeply situated within routines of mobility, multitasking, and personalization. As Livingstone (2004) and Jenkins (2006) argue, contemporary audiences participate in meaning-making through negotiated interpretations and varying degrees of engagement. This shift reflects the rise of the “new listener” who is increasingly active in the production of meaning (BONINI, 2015b). Carpentier’s (2011) distinction between formal and symbolic participation further clarifies how the act of listening to educational podcasts can be experienced as belonging or co-learning, even in the absence of direct interaction. Contributions from uses and gratifications research (MCCLUNG; JOHNSON, 2010) and learning ecology frameworks (BARRON, 2006) support this view by showing how teachers, students, and self-directed learners integrate podcasts into flexible and exploratory educational pathways distributed across multiple digital environments.

The third theoretical pillar stems from platform and circulation studies, essential for understanding how podcasts are produced, categorized, and distributed within algorithmically governed ecosystems. Platforms such as Spotify, Apple Podcasts, and YouTube do not merely host content; they shape its visibility and reach by operating through recommendation systems, attention metrics, and monetization models (NIEBORG; POELL, 2018; VAN DIJCK; POELL; DE WAAL, 2018). This infrastructure conditions the sustainability of educational productions and influences publishing rhythms, extensibility, and audience retention strategies adopted by creators. For independent educational podcasts, the dominant category within the sample, these dynamics are especially determinant, as they constrain organic reach and expose producers to the pressures of algorithmic performativity.

Research objectives

This study aims to develop a theoretically grounded understanding of the emerging ecosystem of educational podcasts in Spain by examining how these productions are conceived, structured, narrated, and circulated within platform-based media environments. Rather than mapping

the entire field, the research focuses on identifying characteristic configurations shaped by hybrid genres, active audience practices, and the infrastructural constraints highlighted in recent scholarship. The analysis concentrates on four dimensions: the production structures that reveal varying degrees of professionalization; the hosting models through which voices construct pedagogical authority and intimacy; the discursive strategies (narrative, conversational, didactic, or hybrid) that reflect the dialogic and multimodal potential described by Bakhtin (1986), Charaudeau (2003), and contemporary podcast studies; and the circulation logics shaped by the algorithmic dynamics of platforms, as discussed by Nieborg and Poell (2018) and Van Dijck, Poell and De Waal (2018). Together, these objectives support an interpretive cartography of educational podcasting in Spain and contribute to broader debates on the intersections between learning, discourse, and digital infrastructures.

Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-method design combining descriptive mapping and interpretative analysis. Rather than aiming for statistical generalization, the methodological approach aligns with interpretive, pattern-identification objectives commonly used in studies of emerging digital media ecosystems (SCHREIER, 2012; KRIPPENDORFF, 2019). Below, the methodological components of the study are described to provide transparency and theoretical coherence.

Research design

The study follows a qualitative-quantitative, exploratory design structured around three analytical axes: production structures, hosting models, and discursive strategies. Each axis was operationalized through a structured coding instrument that combines categorical variables (e.g., duration, publication frequency) with interpretive codes (e.g., pedagogical tone, genre hybridity). This design enables both descriptive mapping and theoretically informed interpretation.

Sample selection

The sample comprises 21 educational podcasts active in Spain between 2020 and 2025, selected through a non-probabilistic, curated strategy aimed at identifying influential cases within a rapidly expanding ecosystem (Chart 1). Included productions explicitly define themselves as educational, are openly available on major platforms (Spotify, iVoox, Apple Podcasts, and Google Podcasts), and demonstrate continuity through at least one year of activity or a minimum of ten episodes. Audience

Chart 1 – Sample of Educational Podcasts.

Podcast	Activity	Hosting model and presenter
<i>Educación 3.0</i>	2018 – 2021	Institutional, editorial
<i>Un Café con Rosa Liarte</i>	2020 – Active	Rosa Liarte Alcaine
<i>Un Idioma sin Fronteras</i>	2018 – Active	Ángela Núñez (RTVE)
<i>Aprender de Grandes</i>	2016 – Active	Gerry Garbulsky
<i>La Fábrica de la Ciencia</i>	2015 – 2022	David Ibáñez
<i>Filosofía de Bolsillo</i>	2020 – Active	Diego Civilotti
<i>A Pie de Pizarra</i>	2018 – 2020	Several; main: Juanjo Vergara
<i>Atención Selectiva</i>	2019 – Active	Elvira Fernández
<i>Píldoras de Educación</i>	2019 – Active	David Santos
<i>SER Historia</i>	2009 – Active	Nacho Ares
<i>A Hombros de Gigantes</i>	2006 – Active	Collective; main: Manuel Seara Valero
<i>Educar Hoy</i>	2020 – 2021	Judith Álamo
<i>La Brújula de la Ciencia</i>	2010 – Active	Alberto Aparici
<i>Pasajes de la Historia</i>	1995 – 2010	Juan Antonio Cebrián
<i>La Historia del Mundo</i>	2018 – 2018	Diana Uribe
<i>CienciaEs</i>	2010 – Active	Collective, Ángel Rdz. Lozano
<i>L de Lengua</i>	2014 – Active	Collective, Francisco Herrera
<i>Entretén a los Niños</i>	2020 – 2021	Fanny Romero
<i>Historia para Selectividad</i>	2019 - Active	Juan Jesús Pleguezuelos
<i>Elementary Podcast</i>	2010 – 2015	Institutional, anonymous
<i>Ven con un Cuento</i>	2018 – 2021	Institutional, anonymous

*Frequency of publication during the active period, based on producer statements or inferred from the most recent episodes available.

Source: Compiled by the authors.

engagement indicators, such as ratings, rankings, and social media presence, served as proxies for relevance. This exemplar-based approach, appropriate for exploratory research, prioritizes emerging patterns in production, circulation, and discursive experimentation rather than statistical representativeness. “Influence” was operationalized through qualitative indicators of digital visibility, including sustained cross-platform presence, institutional endorsements, recognition within educational communities, and positioning in search results and curated lists, given the limited availability of standardized audience metrics.

Data collection and analysis

Data collection took place between May and August 2024 through a systematic review of podcast platforms, official websites, and social media profiles, compiling information on origin, institutional affiliation, number and duration of episodes, publication regularity, host profiles, thematic orientation, pedagogical and narrative strategies, and mechanisms of multiplatform circulation. A coding protocol was developed integrating formal, discursive, and circulation variables, encompassing production structures, genre and pedagogical intent, storytelling, tone, audience orientation, and algorithmic visibility. The analytical process combined a descriptive mapping of the corpus, a theoretical interpretation of emerging patterns, and a critical synthesis that illuminated the tensions, trends, and implications of the evolving educational podcast ecosystem in Spain.

Limitations

As an exploratory study based on a curated, non-probabilistic sample, the findings do not represent the full diversity of Spain’s educational podcast landscape but illustrate tendencies within visible and influential productions. Limited access to platform metrics, such as listenership or completion rates, also constrains precise assessments of audience impact. Furthermore, interpretation of discursive and pedagogical strategies

entails subjectivity inherent to qualitative research, despite the use of a structured coding protocol and triangulation. Nevertheless, the study provides relevant insights into the structure, narration, and circulation of educational podcasts within platform ecosystems.

Results

The results are organized into three analytical dimensions derived from the coding scheme: production structures, hosting models, and discursive strategies. This structure aligns with the specific research objectives and enables the identification of dominant patterns within Spain's educational podcast ecosystem.

Production structures

The production structures observed in the sample reveal a heterogeneous yet patterned ecosystem, where institutional and independent initiatives coexist and shape the contour of contemporary educational podcasting in Spain. This diversity reflects the broader hybridity of podcast genres described by Bakhtin (1986) and later explored in podcast studies by Llinares, Fox and Berry (2018) and Lindgren and Loviglio (2022), who emphasize how the medium blends professionalized and grassroots practices within the same communicative environment.

Institutional productions, often originating in universities, public organizations, cultural institutions, or educational foundations, tend to exhibit more formalized workflows. Their episodes typically reflect clearer editorial planning, distributed production roles, and stable technical infrastructures. The presence of producers, scriptwriters, sound editors, and communication teams contributes to greater regularity in publication and to a refined sound design. This organizational density mirrors what Charaudeau (2003) describes as a structured communicative contract, where the institution implicitly guarantees coherence, authority, and continuity to its audience.

Independent podcasts operate under markedly different conditions. Many emerge from the personal initiative of educators, researchers, or

enthusiasts who adopt flexible and often experimental production models, driven by the desire for creative autonomy and community building (MARKMAN, 2012). Limited financial resources frequently lead to minimal staffing, sometimes involving a single creator who assumes the roles of host, producer, and editor. Yet, despite these constraints, independent productions often cultivate a strong sense of intimacy and authenticity, traits that Llinares, Fox and Berry (2018) identify as central to podcast culture. Their publication rhythms fluctuate more freely, influenced by academic calendars, professional obligations, or the personal availability of creators.

Across both institutional and independent contexts, temporal organization varies considerably. Some programs publish episodes on weekly or biweekly schedules, fostering predictability and audience loyalty. Others adopt seasonal formats aligned with thematic series or curricular structures. Irregular schedules also appear, particularly in grassroots productions that rely on voluntary labor or intermittent funding. These discontinuities underscore the precariousness inherent in what Van Dijck, Poell and De Waal (2018) call platformized cultural production, where visibility, sustainability, and momentum are deeply conditioned by algorithmic economies.

Technological choices further differentiate production structures. The widespread use of accessible recording and editing tools (portable microphones, digital audio workstations, and low-cost hosting services) enables producers with varying levels of expertise to participate in the ecosystem. Even when equipment is modest, attention to vocal clarity and basic post-production editing demonstrates a shared commitment to communicative legibility, echoing what Bakhtin (1986) conceptualizes as the need for genres to remain intelligible despite their fluid boundaries.

Overall, educational podcast production in Spain reflects a hybrid ecosystem marked by experimentation and uneven professionalization, where institutional stability coexists with independent innovation. Formal communicative structures intersect with personalized forms of mediated pedagogy, shaping not only the sonic qualities and publishing rhythms of podcasts, but

also audience engagement. These dynamics underscore the interdependence between production practices, discursive forms, and platform governance.

Public funding constitutes a key structural factor for several institutional productions. Initiatives supported by national or regional cultural and educational programs, particularly those linked to public broadcasters, universities, or cultural agencies, benefit from more stable infrastructures and longer-term sustainability. This institutional backing contrasts with the precarious conditions faced by independent creators, generating asymmetries in visibility and continuity. The absence of standardized and sustainable economic models limits the consolidation of educational podcasting as a stable resource, highlighting the need for clearer public policies and defined support mechanisms. Sustainability, therefore, depends not only on internal factors such as publishing frequency or hosting style, but also on broader structural conditions.

Hosting models

The hosting models identified across the sample reveal how educational podcasts construct distinct communicative contracts and modes of audience engagement. These hosting configurations, ranging from individual-led formats to collaborative and multi-voiced arrangements, reflect the hybrid nature of podcast genres discussed by Bakhtin (1986), who emphasizes how dialogic forms accommodate multiple voices, positions, and narrative functions within the same communicative space. In podcasting, such hybridity becomes particularly salient, as the host's role oscillates between narrator, educator, facilitator, and interlocutor, depending on the program's pedagogical goals and stylistic orientation.

Individually hosted podcasts constitute a prominent configuration in the corpus. These productions often rely on the host's personal authority, expertise, or pedagogical charisma to establish an intimate relationship with listeners. The affective proximity generated through a single, stable voice aligns with what Llinares, Fox and Berry (2018) describe as the distinctive "intimacy of podcast listening," a form of mediated closeness

that invites the audience into a quasi-conversational learning environment. This format is common among independent creators, many of whom position themselves as both educators and companions, guiding listeners through conceptual explanations, reflective commentary, or thematic explorations.

Conversational hosting models introduce a more explicitly dialogic structure. Co-hosted formats, roundtable discussions, or tandem presenter dynamics create discursive environments where knowledge is constructed collaboratively. These configurations resonate with Bakhtin's (1986) concept of polyphony and Charaudeau's (2003) notion of co-enunciation, as multiple voices contribute to the elaboration of meaning and the negotiation of interpretive positions. From the listener's perspective, such models enhance the perception of authenticity, spontaneity, and intellectual reciprocity. Conversation-driven educational podcasts often integrate humor, disagreement, and shared problem-solving, echoing Lindgren and Loviglio's (2022) observation that podcasts simulate the rhythms of everyday talk and thereby create spaces of cognitive companionship.

Interview-based hosting represents another significant model. In these productions, the host assumes the role of mediator, guiding expert guests through discussions that blend academic rigor with accessible exposition. Drawing on Livingstone's (2004) framework of interpretive audiences, the host functions as a proxy for listeners, posing clarifying questions, translating specialized vocabulary, and structuring the flow of dialogue to facilitate comprehension. Jenkins's (2006) and Carpentier's (2011) contributions to participatory media theory further illuminate this format: although listeners do not intervene directly, the interview structure symbolically invites them into a community of shared inquiries.

Multi-host or ensemble formats, which appear most frequently in institutionally backed productions, reinforce institutional authority while distributing communicative roles among several participants. This model often mirrors academic or organizational structures, featuring rotating experts, thematic segments, or collaborative pedagogical tasks.

Such configurations align with the “organized communicative contract” described by Charaudeau (2003), in which the plurality of voices signals institutional legitimacy and collective expertise.

Across all these models, the host’s role intersects with broader processes of platformization. As Van Dijck, Poell and De Waal (2018) argue, digital platforms reward distinctive voices, consistent publishing personas, and forms of address that sustain audience attention. Hosting thus becomes not only a communicative function but also a strategic positioning within algorithmic economies of visibility. The cultivation of voice, rhythm, personality, and narrative presence operates simultaneously at the discursive level and at the level of platform performance.

The hosting models identified in the sample reveal the centrality of voice, both literal and metaphorical, in shaping the pedagogical and relational qualities of educational podcasts. Whether through solitary narration, dialogic exchange, mediated interviews, or collective presentation, hosts enact the hybrid communicative possibilities of podcasting, blending didactic clarity with conversational intimacy and creating learning environments that resonate with contemporary audience practices.

Discursive strategies

The discursive strategies employed across the educational podcasts in the sample reflect the hybrid and adaptive nature of podcast language, illustrating how content creators navigate and recombine multiple communicative traditions to meet pedagogical, narrative, and platform-driven imperatives. At the core of these strategies lies the dialogic conception of discourse articulated by Bakhtin (1986), for whom genres emerge from the interplay of voices, contexts, and communicative purposes. The podcasts analyzed exemplify this principle through their dynamic blending of explanation, narration, conversation, and reflection, resulting in a spectrum of discursive modes that depart from conventional didactic formats.

One of the most recurrent strategies is the use of narrative structuring to frame educational content. Storytelling practices, whether through

anecdotal openings, personal testimonies, or dramatized examples, serve to contextualize concepts, create affective engagement, and reduce cognitive distance. Llinares, Fox and Berry (2018) argue that narrative is integral to podcast culture, not merely as an aesthetic choice but as a way of constructing proximity between speaker and listener. In educational podcasts, this proximity becomes a pedagogical asset: narrativized explanations foster retention, guide listeners through complex topics, and humanize expert knowledge. Lindgren and Loviglio (2022) further notes that narrative cues, such as suspense or thematic arcs, maintain attention in audio environments where distraction is common, thereby enhancing the medium's learning potential.

For instance, the podcast *La Brújula de la Ciencia* frequently structures episodes around narrative-driven explanations of scientific phenomena, combining storytelling with didactic exposition. Episodes often begin with an anecdote or historical vignette that frames the topic before moving into conceptual clarification, illustrating how narrative scaffolding functions as a pedagogical strategy.

Conversational discourse plays a central role in shaping these podcasts' communicative identity. Co-hosted discussions and interviews stimulate informal learning spaces where knowledge is co-constructed rather than transmitted unidirectionally. This horizontality reflects Charaudeau's (2003) notion of the communicative contract, as dialogic formats redistribute authority and accessibility. By privileging dialogue over monologic exposition, educational podcasts position listeners as interpretive participants, aligning with Livingstone's (2004) view of active audiences and with participatory frameworks proposed by Jenkins (2006) and Carpentier (2011), in which mediated or symbolic engagement contributes to meaning-making.

Another discursive strategy observed involves the integration of explicit pedagogical scaffolding. Many podcasts employ signposting language ("let's review," "key idea," "in summary"), modular episode structures, or conceptual checkpoints designed to orient listening and facilitate comprehension. These strategies, while rooted in instructional communication, are adapted

to the affordances of audio-on-demand, where asynchronous listening and multitasking require clear organizational cues. The presence of such scaffolding reinforces the pedagogical intent of these productions while simultaneously acknowledging the interpretive autonomy of listeners, who may pause, revisit, or supplement content across platforms.

Platformized circulation also influences discursive choices. The need for discoverability on services like Spotify or Apple Podcasts encourages the use of descriptive episode titles, thematic keywords, and concise introductory summaries that function as paratextual strategies within algorithmic environments. As Nieborg and Poell (2018) and Van Dijck, Poell and De Waal (2018) observe, platform governance shapes cultural production by privileging particular forms of visibility and engagement. In this context, podcasts adopt discursive practices that enhance algorithmic readability, such as clearly defined topics, frequent segmentation, or repeated branding cues, while striving to maintain narrative coherence and pedagogical nuance.

Finally, the tonal qualities of educational podcasts constitute an important discursive dimension. Many hosts adopt a tone that oscillates between formal expertise and approachable informality, a balance that reflects the medium's dual identity as both an instructional and intimate communicative space. This tonal hybridity not only facilitates comprehension but also reinforces listener identification, creating a sense of companionship that aligns with broader trends in contemporary podcasting.

Taken together, the discursive strategies identified in the sample demonstrate how educational podcasts mobilize a complex repertoire of linguistic, narrative, and paratextual resources to construct meaningful learning environments. These strategies embody the hybrid character of podcast discourse, where pedagogical clarity, conversational intimacy, and platform logics converge to shape the ways knowledge is produced, shared, and interpreted.

Discussion

Before discussing the findings, it is important to reiterate the exploratory nature of this study and the limitations of its sample. Although the results

cannot be generalized beyond the cases analyzed, the patterns identified suggest broader tendencies within Spain's educational podcast ecosystem. These interpretations should therefore be understood as analytically grounded insights rather than definitive conclusions, offering a preliminary empirical basis for future research.

This section provides a theoretically grounded interpretation of the findings, organized around four interrelated analytical threads: genre hybridization, host mediation, platform-mediated circulation, and educational podcasts as components of informal learning ecologies. Together, these dimensions illuminate the cultural, communicative, and pedagogical implications of Spain's emerging educational podcast landscape, highlighting how emerging audio practices intersect with broader transformations in digital media and knowledge production.

Genre hybridization and educational audio discourses

The analysis shows a podcast ecosystem marked by pronounced genre hybridization, combining didactic exposition, conversational exchange, narrative storytelling, and documentary elements. This aligns with Bakhtin's (1986) view of genres as fluid, intersecting practices that adapt to new communicative needs, and with Charaudeau's (2003) notion of shifting "communicative contracts", where educational discourse blends with affective or journalistic modes. As Llinares, Fox and Berry (2018) note, podcasting's flexibility and distance from legacy media encourage such hybrid experimentation. In Spain, this hybridity functions both as a stylistic choice and as an adaptive response to platform dynamics and audience expectations, shaping a distinctive discursive field in digital education.

Hosts as pedagogical mediators

Hosts emerge as central mediators of educational meaning, shaping how listeners interpret content through their roles as experts, teachers, journalists, or hybrid communicators. This reflects Livingstone's (2004) argument that audiences rely on communicative cues to anchor

interpretation. Hosting styles also cultivate forms of belonging that echo Jenkins's (2006) participatory culture and Carpentier's (2011) "minimalist participation," fostering imagined interaction even without direct audience involvement. Co-hosted dynamics further resonate with Bakhtinian dialogism, presenting knowledge as a co-constructed process rather than a monologic transmission. Through these strategies, hosts balance expertise and accessibility, facilitating both engagement and learning.

Platform logics and circulation

Production patterns in the sample reveal strong dependencies on platform governance. Irregular publishing rhythms, limited monetization, and variable sustainability mirror broader platformized conditions described by Nieborg and Poell (2018), where visibility depends on algorithmic selection and attention optimization. Discoverability relies heavily on metadata, cross-platform promotion, and back-catalog strength, especially for independent creators lacking institutional support. Variations in episode length and formatting reflect adaptations to what Van Dijck, Nieborg, and Poell (2018) describe as "platform vernaculars," demonstrating that educational podcasts are shaped by the constraints and incentives embedded in digital infrastructures.

Educational podcasts in informal learning ecologies

The structural and discursive traits identified align with ecological perspectives on informal learning. Following Barron (2006), podcasts function as accessible nodes within broader learning networks, enabling flexible, self-directed engagement integrated into everyday routines, consistent with Sefton-Green's (2013) emphasis on learning embedded in daily life. Podcasts aimed at teachers or professional groups illustrate Wenger's (1998) communities of practice, where reflective dialogue supports both knowledge sharing and identity formation. Thus, educational podcasts contribute not only to information delivery but to sustaining learning communities.

Structural tendencies in Spain's educational podcasting

Overall, several tendencies characterize Spain's educational podcasting field: hybrid genres shaped by platform pressures, hosts acting as epistemic mediators, production influenced by platform logics that heighten precarity and variability, and the integration of podcasts into informal learning ecologies that support lifelong learning. While not exhaustive of the entire ecosystem, these tendencies offer a theoretically grounded view of how educational podcasts operate as cultural artefacts within complex sociotechnical environments, where digital media reconfigure contemporary educational practices.

Conclusion

This exploratory study has examined a curated set of influential educational podcasts in Spain to identify patterns in production structures, hosting models, and discursive strategies. The analysis shows that educational podcasts constitute a distinctive communicative field within contemporary digital media ecosystems.

Four key insights emerge. First, educational podcasts display pronounced genre hybridization, combining didactic, conversational, and narrative modes into flexible pedagogical discourses adapted to digital audio. Second, hosts function as central epistemic mediators, whose identities and communicative styles shape meaning-making processes and listener engagement. Third, platform logics significantly influence production, sustainability, and circulation, revealing precarious conditions on many educational audio productions. Finally, podcasts contribute to informal learning ecologies by supporting self-directed learning, professional reflection, and communities of practice.

Despite its non-representative sample and interpretive approach, the study provides a theoretically grounded snapshot of structural and cultural dynamics shaping educational podcasting in Spain. Future research should expand the sample, incorporate cross-national comparisons, examine audience reception empirically, and analyze the impact of platform algorithms on educational content distribution.

By situating empirical findings within broader theoretical debates, this study contributes to communication scholarship on digital audio and educational media, demonstrating that educational podcasts are complex sociotechnical artefacts whose genres, discourses, and circulation illuminate transformations in contemporary communication and learning.

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