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# Talk the Talk: (Re)Introducing EFL Learners to Podcasts through NotebookLM

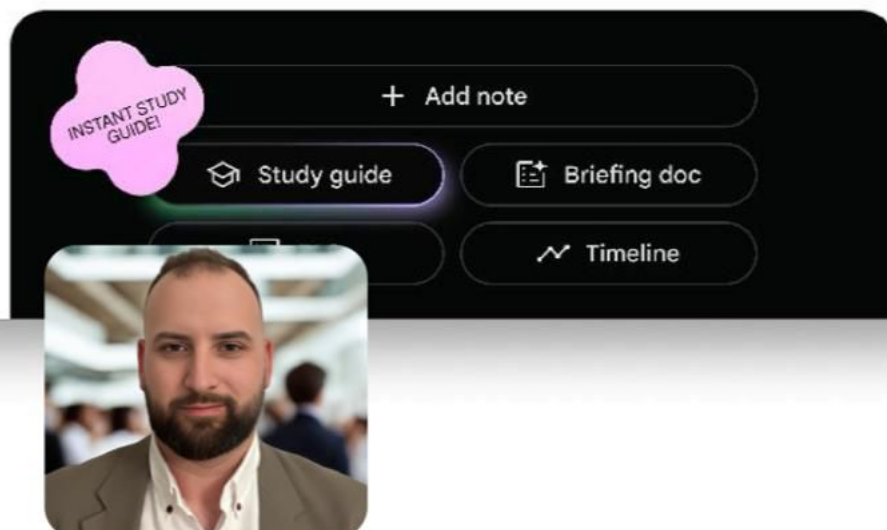
Podcasting is a great way to learn, be entertained,  
and stay current on a wide range of topics.

— Neil deGrasse Tyson

— Carlos Lindade



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In just two decades, podcasting has evolved from a niche pastime into a potent approach for language teaching and learning. New generative-AI tools—perhaps chief among them **Google’s NotebookLM** with its ‘audio overview’ and ‘interactive mode’—are lowering the technical bar and opening fresh pedagogical possibilities. After surveying the evidence on podcasting in the context of EFL, this article explains what NotebookLM really can do and considers its potential use by teachers and students. Ultimately this article aims to explore how NotebookLM can be leveraged to introduce students to the world of podcasting, while staying aligned with the national curricula and promoting learner agency and digital literacies.

Over the past few years, a steady stream of studies has moved podcasting from a potential fad to a demonstrably effective catalyst for English learning. In Spain, secondary pupils who produced a socially themed podcast outperformed a control group on both oral and written post-tests (Chaves-Yuste & de la Peña, 2023). A mixed-methods study in Colombia found that ten weeks of podcast-based homework lifted low-proficiency freshmen nearly a full CEFR band in listening comprehension while boosting motivation (Delgadillo & Illera, 2024). A 2024 systematic review of eighteen classroom trials adds that learners consistently report higher motivation, greater enjoyment and a sense of control over pacing and replay (Ramirez, 2024). An action-research project with Taiwanese undergraduates found that designing and publishing their own episodes boosted self-directed learning behaviours, metacognitive strategy use and oral fluency in just one semester (Yang, 2025). All of this reflects Panagiotidis’ (2021) earlier meta-review, which argues that podcasts fit learners’ “always-connected lifestyle”, allowing authentic input to seep into the cracks of their day—on their way to school, on their way home, waiting in a queue—without demanding extra timetabled hours. In short, podcasts offer a rare pedagogical “triple win”: tangible skill gains, heightened autonomy, and an authenticity of voice.

#### **NotebookLM: AI producer, host—and conversation partner**

NotebookLM began its life as a simple note-taking experiment, but three key updates have turned it into something far more interesting

for ELT. First came Audio Overview (September 2024), a one-click option that ingests whatever multimodal sources is provided— class notes, PDFs, slides, links to YouTube and/or websites—and spins them into a lively, two-host conversation that users can download as an MP3 or stream directly in the browser. Google designed the feature to be a deep-dive discussion of the provided sources. In a nutshell, after finding the appropriate sources and by pressing *Generate*, users will obtain a tailor-made model podcast. Later that year (December 2024), Google layered on Interactive Mode: with a single tap the user can *join* the recorded conversation, wait for one of the AI hosts to “call on” them, and ask follow-up questions in natural language; the hosts pause, respond with an explanation drawn from the same uploaded sources, and then glide back into their scripted chat. In practice this turns a passive listening task into an active retrieval cycle—students predict, question, receive feedback, and immediately hear the language re-modelled in context. Finally, the June 2025 update made it possible to share a notebook (and its audio overview) publicly via a simple link, eliminating account-creation hurdles and letting teachers embed the episode in Classroom, Moodle, Teams or even WhatsApp groups. For ELT material development, these three tweaks collapse what used to be hours of technical labour—scripting, recording, editing—into minutes, while preserving some pedagogic control: you choose the sources, you verify the AI-generated audio, and you decide whether the interactive layer is going to be used by your learners. Because the output is a bona-fide podcast file, and drawing from my own experience, learners encounter the genre’s



real-world conventions long before they attempt their own production, lowering the intimidation threshold and modelling discourse structures that textbooks rarely capture.

### **Pedagogical pathways—linking NotebookLM to Portugal's *Aprendizagens Essenciais* and the PASEO**

NotebookLM's podcast tools unlock at least four intertwined pathways that map neatly onto the national curricula. First, a flipped-listening routine—uploading the content students will learn next, generating an Audio Overview, and assigning it for homework—directly activates the *Aprendizagens Essenciais* (AE) descriptors for listening while nurturing the PASEO competence of autonomous learning: students choose when and how often to replay, developing the self-regulation expected (Direção-Geral da Educação, 2017; 2018). Second, when students feed classroom and/or research notes into NotebookLM to generate their own podcast, they engage several PASEO cross-cutting areas: creativity, critical thinking, and digital literacy. They can later learn to fact-check the podcast, so they learn how to assess the quality of the content. Third, the micro-listening & retrieval cycle afforded by Interactive Mode—pausing the hosts to ask questions builds strategic listening skills and supports PASEO's emphasis on problem solving: learners identify a comprehension gap and immediately source a solution. Finally, the one-click multimodal source-to-speech affordance yields an instant accessibility layer; visually-impaired students or those with dyslexia can access dense course contents aurally, embodying the inclusive ethos of decree-law 54/2018. In sum, NotebookLM has the potential to offer concrete, curricula-aligned scaffold through which in-service teachers can deliver authentic input, foster learner agency, and meet national targets for 21st-century competences.

### **Benefits—clearly—and the equally clear shortcomings**

NotebookLM's rapid rise requires one to balance its main advantages against the limitations that still demand human vigilance. Concerning benefits, NotebookLM's speed is utterly impressive, and speed matters when

weekly contact hours are limited and the workload are barely manageable. Second, the Interactive mode nudges passive listeners toward dialogic engagement. Learners who “join” the AI hosts to request clarification(s) are rehearsing the same negotiation-of-meaning moves that underpin communicative competence (Peters, 2024). Third, and as mentioned previously, it may possibly lower cognitive load and offer visually impaired or dyslexic learners a potential support others take for granted. Finally, early classroom reports suggest a motivational spill-over: once learners acknowledge how impressive an AI-voiced podcast sounds, many want to outdo it with their own recordings—an intrinsic push few worksheets can match (Baskara et al., 2024).

Regarding shortcomings, accuracy remains the most acknowledged flaw. At this stage, every Audio Overview still needs manual fact-checking. Furthermore, Interactive Mode still speaks English only and, crucially, evaporates after playback; neither the spontaneous Q-and-A nor a log of student questions can be downloaded (Google Help, 2025). While this is still important for autonomous study, it limits evidence of learning and frustrates revision. Moreover, accent diversity is also an issue. The AI hosts are modelled on global-north accents and while they are highly intelligible, we risk accent bias (Michel et al., 2025). Pedagogically, NotebookLM offers no native recording, editing or RSS publishing. It is a great tool to introduce students to instant podcasts but empowering them to host their own podcasts is another step and would require the use of other platforms. Lastly, if NotebookLM keeps on evolving and if in the future it is given the ability to evaluate learner's interaction with the podcast, it may count as a “high-risk” educational AI system under the AI Act (Regulation (EU) 2024/1689), which would require schools to document data flows, secure parental consent for minors and navigate the great unknown.

Taken together, these benefits and shortcomings argue for a co-pilot ethos. NotebookLM excels at curating and voicing content on demand. However, human teachers remain indispensable for accuracy, ethical oversight and the irreplaceable warmth of real voices.



## Conclusion: NotebookLM as the on-ramp to authentic podcasting

The magic behind podcasts has always been its low-threshold, high-reward blend of authentic language, audience awareness and learner autonomy. Google's NotebookLM now lowers that threshold even further. Audio Overview compresses an hour of teacher scripting and editing into a five-minute click, giving learners a model podcast that is tightly grounded (hopefully) in the very contents they will study next. Interactive Mode then turns that model into a rehearsal room: students can interrupt the AI hosts, probe for clarifications and rehearse paraphrases before they take the next

step and are challenged to host their own podcast. While the caveats remain—hallucinations, bandwidth gaps, data-privacy checks—with a vigilant teacher these are speed bumps, not roadblocks. NotebookLM won't replace the messy, exhilarating work of students crafting an original show; it simply gives them a tool they can use in their learning journey and when used innovatively, the creative and linguistic energies can flow where they belong: into the learners' voices.

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