ENHANCING STUDENTS' ENGLISH SPEAKING SKILLS: INSTRUCTORS' STRATEGIES IN BLENDED LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

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Keywords	Abstract
	This research examines the instructional strategies employed by English instructors to enhance students' speaking skills in a blended learning environment. Despite the fact that blended learning has been widely adopted in formal higher education settings, few studies have investigated how blended learning operates in small private English courses with diverse young adult learners. The purpose of this study is to identify the strategies used in designing blended speaking lessons and to examine its perceived impacts on student performance. A qualitative case study design was carried out which involved two experienced instructors teaching five speaking classes. The researchers collected the data through classroom observations and semi structured interviews. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The results of this study reveal three dominant strategies: task-based speaking cycles across online and offline modes, structured asynchronous practice using digital platforms, and personalized feedback loops. These strategies were perceived to improve students' fluency, confidence, and autonomy by providing low pressure rehearsal spaces and targeted support. These demonstrate that effective blended speaking instruction depends more on intentional pedagogical design than on technological sophistication, particularly in contexts where the resources are limited. This research expands the current understanding of blended learning practices beyond higher education environments.
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INTRODUCTION

Blended learning has emerged as a central instructional approach in English language teaching (ELT). It has combined the strengths of face to face interaction with digital platforms to support language development. Throughout the last decade, instructors and researchers have emphasized its pedagogical potential to improve communicative competence, particularly in speaking skills through which interaction, feedback, and

authenticity are essential (McCarthy, 2021; Mizza & Rubio, 2020). The integration of online modalities provides students to access flexible speaking opportunities. It also allows them to experiment with language use in low pressure settings and receive multimodal feedback while still benefiting from classroom-based scaffolding. In this framework, blended learning represents a broader shift in language education toward students centered approaches which promote their autonomy, engagement, and sustained practice.

Recent studies highlight how technology that supported language learning environments reshape instructional strategies. These studies show how digital platforms encourage asynchronous speaking practice, peer collaboration, and individualized support which enable instructors to design speaking tasks that extend beyond classroom time (Burimskaya & Frolova, 2023; Klymova et al., 2023). At the same time, blended learning environments demand instructors to develop digital competencies and pedagogical flexibility to manage both modalities effectively (Biletska et al., 2021). Innovations in artificial intelligence and online learning tools further broaden instructional possibilities, influencing teacher decision making and how students interact to each other (Al-Khresheh, 2024; Li et al., 2025). Meta-analytic evidence also demonstrates a growing interest in the role of AI-supported instruction in language learning, especially for communicative skills (Ekizer, 2025; Torres & Kahveci, 2025).

In the domain of speaking pedagogy, blended learning approaches have been examined across various educational settings. Research in higher education environments shows that blended models are able to support students in building their confidence, in developing their fluency, and in engaging a more meaningful communication (Amante, 2025; Kalyniuk et al., 2024). For specific learner groups, blended learnings have facilitated integration into academic environments and improved access to language practice (Kuzmina et al., 2021; Jehoul et al., 2025). Other studies demonstrate that online-offline rotations enable structured speaking practice in professional and academic disciplines, including Business English and discipline-specific communication courses (Khan & Khan, 2024; Wang, 2025; Sun et al., 2024). The findings of these studies strengthen the idea that blended learning approach is not a single method but a skillset of instructional strategies shaped by context, instructor expertise, and learner needs.

Despite the rising volume of studies, two significant limitations must be addressed within the current literature in blended learning contexts. Firstly, it is observed that existing studies are highly concentrated on blended learning implementation within predominant formal academic institutions. This includes settings in universities, medical faculties, and a variety of higher education programs. These settings in general possess well extablished technological infrastructure and vigorous institutional support ((Kalyniuk et al., 2024; Persolja, 2025). In contrast, insufficient attention has been devoted to small scale language learning settings such as private English courses which operate in local settings. In these much smaller contexts, instructors often depend entirely on personal teaching experience due to very limited available resources. Secondly, studies on blended speaking instruction frequently examine learner outcomes, their motivation levels, or the specific function of digital tools. However, there is an insufficiency of studies that investigate the instructional strategies that instructors utilize in their day to day practice. Hence, the manner in which these instructors strategies effectively shape speaking performance in the authentic classroom settings remains underexplored (Burimskaya & Frolova, 2023; Jia et al., 2025).

In particular, there is not much research regarding how experienced instructors utilize blended learning to teach speaking in private English courses located in small towns. This context is pivotal because pedagogical decisions are primarily influenced by various factors. These includes the size of the classes, the diversity background of students, significant challenges on resources, and the instructors' personal familiarity with technology.

This present study, hence, aims address directly this identified gap. This is achieved by closely investigating the strategic approaches as applied by two selected instructors. Each of the two has five years teaching experience who implemented blended learning in five distinct speaking classes. Each class consisted of 12 to 15 students and was conducted in a local private English courses. By focusing on concrete instructional practice, this present study seeks to widen the current understanding of blended leaning pedagogy beyond established university settings. Moreover, this study intends to contribute valuable empirical insight with regard to how the instructors conduct significant connection between the online and offline component to effectively enhance students' speaking fluency, confidence, and autonomy.

To address the gaps detailed above, two principal research questions were proposed for investigation in this study:

1. What instructional strategies do instructors use to teach English speaking skills in blended learning environments?
2. How do instructors perceive the impacts of these strategies on students' speaking performance in terms of fluency, confidence, and autonomy?

METHOD

This study applied a qualitative case study design to investigate how instructors conceptualize and implement instructional practices in a diverse learning environment. A case study approach provides contextual depth and allows examination of instructional decision making within authentic classroom dynamics. The qualitative orientation reflects the study's emphasis on meaning making, subjective experiences, and situated pedagogical practices rather than measurement of variables.

The study was conducted in an intensive program for young adults preparing for academic pathways and professional careers. All of 53 participants in the program came from heterogeneous educational and social backgrounds and consisted of 30 female and 23 male participants. They included high school graduates taking a gap year, junior workers with less than 3 years of professional experience, and early year university students.

All participants were approximately 18 to 22 years old, representing a transitional stage between secondary education and early adulthood. This diverse demographic composition created a rich context for exploring instructional strategies, because the instructors had to address varied levels of academic preparedness, maturity, and learning motivation. The participant data were shown in the following table.

Table 1. Participant Data

Participant	Class	Age	Educational and Social Background
Participant 1	A	19	High school graduates taking a gap year
Participant 2		18	Early year university student
Participant 3		18	Early year university student
Participant 4		18	Early year university student
Participant 5		22	Junior workers
Participant 6		19	High school graduates taking a gap year
Participant 7		19	High school graduates taking a gap year
Participant 8		21	Junior workers
Participant 9		20	Junior workers
Participant 10		21	Junior workers
Participant 11	B	18	Early year university student
Participant 12		18	Early year university student
Participant 13		18	Early year university student
Participant 14		19	Early year university student
Participant 15		19	High school graduates taking a gap year
Participant 16		21	Junior workers

Participant 17		18	Early year university student
Participant 18		21	Junior workers
Participant 19		20	Junior workers
Participant 20		19	High school graduates taking a gap year
Participant 21	C	20	Junior workers
Participant 21		18	Junior workers
Participant 22		19	Early year university student
Participant 23		18	Early year university student
Participant 24		18	Early year university student
Participant 25		21	Junior workers
Participant 26		20	Junior workers
Participant 27		22	Junior workers
Participant 28		19	High school graduates taking a gap year
Participant 29		19	High school graduates taking a gap year
Participant 30		19	High school graduates taking a gap year
Participant 31		19	High school graduates taking a gap year
Participant 32		19	High school graduates taking a gap year
Participant 33	D	18	Early year university student
Participant 34		18	Early year university student
Participant 35		18	Early year university student
Participant 36		19	Early year university student
Participant 37		18	Early year university student
Participant 38		18	Early year university student
Participant 39		19	High school graduates taking a gap year
Participant 40		19	High school graduates taking a gap year
Participant 41		20	High school graduates taking a gap year
Participant 42		19	High school graduates taking a gap year
Participant 43	E	22	Junior workers
Participant 44		18	Early year university student
Participant 45		18	High school graduates taking a gap year
Participant 46		19	High school graduates taking a gap year
Participant 47		21	Junior workers
Participant 48		20	Junior workers
Participant 49		22	Junior workers
Participant 50		19	High school graduates taking a gap year
Participant 51		19	Early year university student
Participant 52		18	Early year university student
Participant 53		18	Early year university student

The unit of analysis in this case study was the group of instructors responsible for planning and delivering the program's instructional activities. They were selected purposively because of their direct involvement in classroom practices and their capacity to reflect on their teaching experiences.

Data were collected over two months through a combination of classroom observation and semi structured interviews with instructors. This multi-source approach supported methodological triangulation and strengthened the credibility of interpretations.

Non participant observations were carried out across regular instructional sessions. The observations focused on instructional strategies, classroom interaction patterns, instructor and student discourse, and responses to the demographic diversity of students. Field notes were recorded using a structured observation protocol to capture both key events and emerging situational dynamics.

Semi structured interviews were conducted with instructors to explore their pedagogical reasoning. The interview guide included open ended questions designed to elicit reflections on: classroom challenges, instructional decisions, perceptions of learner characteristics, and strategies for supporting diverse background of students. Each

individual face to face interview lasted approximately 60 minutes and was recorded with consent. Interviews were transcribed verbatim for analysis.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis**,** following an inductive and iterative process as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2021). It began with familiarization in which transcripts and observation notes were read repeatedly to identify initial insights and recurring concepts. This was followed by initial coding through which data segments were coded inductively. In this stage the researchers tried to capture meaningful units that related to instructional practices, decision making, and responses to learner diversity. The third process was theme development. Through this process codes were clustered into broader categories and developed into themes that illustrated patterns of practice across data sources. The last stage included interpretation and validation. The researchers interpreted emerged themes in relation to research questions and relevant pedagogical literature. The researchers also compared observation data and interview data against each other to identify similarities, differences, or patterns. This process was done to ensure consistency and strengthen validity.

RESULT

The analysis of classroom observations, interviews with two instructors, and students reflections of five blended speaking classes (each class comprised of 10 to 12 students) revealed three major instructional strategy themes**,** i.e. task-based speaking design across modalities, structured asynchronous speaking practice through digital platforms, and personalized feedback loops. These three strategies were consistently used across all classes, though the extent of integration varied depending on class size, student engagement, and platform familiarity. The following table summarizes the instructional practices implemented in the blended learning environment.

Table 2. Instructional Strategies Identified in the Blended Learning Environment

Strategy	Offline Components	Online Components	Aim
Task Based Speaking Design	Role plays, mini presentations, group discussions	Video recording tasks, topic prompts on LMS	Stimulate authentic communication and fluency
Digital Platform Use	Transitional planning, task briefing	Voice notes, recordings, LMS discussion boards	Extend speaking opportunities beyond class
Personalized Feedback	Immediate oral feedback, corrective recasts	Audio-based feedback, individual notes on recordings	Support accuracy, confidence building
Interaction Management	Peer collaboration, negotiation of meaning	Peer responses to recordings, emoji reactions, short comments	Encourage interaction and autonomy
Reflection Process	Offline reflection on speaking performance	Online self reflection forms, weekly reflection prompts	Reinforce awareness and self evaluation

Students stated that alternating between offline and online learning helped them practice without pressure. They further pointed out that classroom context gave them opportunities to test and refine what they prepared online.

Task Based Speaking Design across Modalities

Both instructors adopted a task based approach, where each weekly learning cycle included pre-task preparation online, task performance offline, and post-task reflection on the LMS. Students documented ideas, rehearsed speaking points, and recorded short monologues before class. As one instructor explained: "Students are more confident if

they already tried speaking online first. In class we just push their performance a little further." Observation notes showed that this sequence reduced hesitation, especially among lower proficiency students who used the pre-task stage to build vocabulary lists or search for expressions.

Asynchronous Speaking through Digital Platforms

A second key strategy was the systematic use of voice notes, and the course LMS for asynchronous speaking practice. Students submitted weekly recordings responding to prompts connected to speaking topics such as short narratives, opinion statements, and mini-summaries. Instructors highlighted that asynchronous speaking created low pressure environments where students felt more comfortable experimenting with language. Students' written reflections repeatedly described digital recordings as a way to "prepare mentally," "practice several times before sending," and "try new expressions learned online."

Personalized Feedback Loops

The third theme concerned personalized feedback, delivered both orally in class and through audio comments on students' recordings. Instructors used corrective recasts during face-to-face practice to support accuracy and fluency, while online feedback allowed detailed comments on pronunciation, pacing, and organization. Students reported valuing the individual attention provided online: "The audio feedback is specific for me, not general for the whole class." Students expressed that this approach helped them understand errors and set individual speaking goals, reinforcing self-monitoring and awareness of progress.

Perceived Impacts on Student Performance

Analysis of reflections and instructor interviews showed three main perceived impacts on student speaking performance. They are improved fluency, greater confidence, and increased learner autonomy. These impacts are summarized below.

Table 3. Perceived Impact of Instructional Strategies on Speaking Performance

Dimension	Offline Evidence	Online Evidence	Overall Outcome
Fluency Development	Longer turns in discussions; reduced pauses	Multiple recording attempts improved organization	Clearer speech production and smoother delivery
Confidence Building	Risk taking in roleplays; willingness to volunteer	Low pressure practice environment	Less anxiety and stronger willingness to speak
Learner Autonomy	Self initiated vocabulary building	Self reflection logs and goal setting	Improved self regulation of speaking practice

Table 3 demonstrates how the instructional strategies are applied in both offline and online contexts and how they contributed to three interrelated dimensions of students' speaking performance, namely fluency development, confidence building, and learner autonomy. Those dimensions do not function in isolation, but they emerge as complementary outcomes that collectively strengthened students' oral communication skills.

With regard to fluency development, the table shows that offline classroom activities encouraged students to take longer turns and reduced excessive pausing during discussions. This indicates growing control over speech flow and idea organization when students interact in classroom. In the online setting, the opportunity to record and re-record speaking tasks have allowed students to reflect on their performance and improve

coherence before submission. Taken together, these practices both offline and online have resulted in clearer speech production and smoother delivery. This suggests that fluency is fostered through a balance of spontaneous interaction and reflective rehearsal.

In term of confidence building, offline evidence points to increased risk taking behavior. For example students' willingness to participate in role plays and volunteer responses. These behaviors signal a reduction in fear of making mistakes in real time speaking situations. It seems that online learning has supported this process by providing a low pressure environment where students could practice speaking without immediate teacher as well as peer judgments. As reflected in the overall outcome, the combination of both offline and online contexts helps reduce speaking anxiety and strengthened students' willingness to communicate orally.

Finally, the learner autonomy dimension underlines a shift in students' responsibility for their own learning. In offline contexts, students began to engage in voluntary vocabulary building which indicates students' awareness of their linguistic needs. Online activities in particular where students do reflection logs and goal oriented tasks has reinforced this independence. This is because both activities encourage students to monitor their progress and plan improvement strategies. Consequently, students demonstrate an improvement of independent speaking practice, which is an essential skill that will sustain their language development beyond the classroom.

All things considered, Table 3 exhibits that the integration of offline and online learning contexts did not only enhance speaking performance at a surface level but also supported deeper affective and cognitive growth. The combination of fluency, confidence, and autonomy implies that the instructional design has addressed both the linguistic and psychological dimensions of students' speaking development.

DISCUSSION

The results of this current research demonstrate that blended learning can enhance speaking performance when instructors apply intentional strategies that harnessed both modalities rather than using online tools as simple extensions of classroom activities. The task cycle across modalities allowed students to experiment with new language forms asynchronously and refine them through synchronous interaction. This is in line with the growing recognition that effective blended pedagogy needs purposefully designed instructional sequences supported by digital tools (Mizza & Rubio, 2020; Wang, 2025). McCarthy (2021) states that blended learning can expand communicative opportunities. This especially occurs when teachers design the online and offline components as interdependent rather than parallel learning spaces. In this study, both instructors created a continuous cycle of input, rehearsal, production, and feedback. Through this cycle the instructors helped learners to mobilize language knowledge across learning environments in a way that strengthened fluency.

Furthermore, the perceived impacts as summarized in Table 3 demonstrate that fluency development, confidence building, and learner autonomy serve as interconnected rather than isolated outcomes. These dimensions emerged through the reciprocal use of offline and online learning settings. This also suggests that speaking development in blended contexts is cumulative and multidimensional rather than linear. This reinforces the view that blended learning fosters sustained practice and increased participation, particularly in speaking oriented instruction where affective factors play a critical role (McCarthy, 2021; Amante, 2025).

In term of fluency development, offline classroom activities encouraged students to take longer speaking turns and reduced excessive pausing during discussions. This indicates growing control over speech flow and idea organization in real time interaction. In the online setting, opportunities to record and re-record speaking tasks allowed students to reflect on their performance and improve coherence prior to submission. Taken together, these complementary practices resulted in clearer speech production and

smoother delivery. The finding supports earlier studies that emphasize the value of task sequencing and reflective rehearsal in blended speaking instruction (Burimskaya & Frolova, 2023; Klymova et al., 2023).

With regard to confidence building, offline evidence pointed to increased risk taking behavior. For example greater willingness to participate in role plays and volunteer responses. These behaviors show a reduction in fear of making mistakes during live speaking activities. Online learning appeared to support this process by providing a low pressure environment where students could practice speaking without immediate teacher or peer judgment. As a result, the integration of offline and online contexts helped reduce speaking anxiety and strengthen students' willingness to communicate orally. This is consistent with findings as reported in blended and technology mediated speaking research (Jia et al., 2025; Kalyniuk et al., 2024).

Finally, the learner autonomy dimension highlights a shift in students' responsibility for managing their own speaking development. In offline settings, students who participated in voluntary vocabulary building were those who had heightened awareness of their linguistic needs. Online reflection logs and goal oriented tasks further reinforced this independence by encouraging learners to monitor progress and plan improvement strategies. As a result, students demonstrated improved self regulation of speaking practice. This aligns with studies that emphasize the role of reflection and individualized support in blended instructional design (Biletska et al., 2021; Mizza & Rubio, 2020).

Building on these outcomes, a central insight from the study is the value of asynchronous speaking practice for confidence building. The use of voice recordings, short individual video tasks, and reflective speaking journals provided students with a psychologically safe space to experiment with language, especially for learners who may be hesitant to speak in front of their peers. This approach is particularly relevant in small private language schools where students may have limited English exposure outside class, contrasting with studies in university contexts where institutional infrastructure, peer networks, and English dominant environments are more accessible (Kalyniuk et al., 2024; Persolja, 2025). Research on blended and rotational models indicates that asynchronous environments can help equalize participation and support learners who benefit from additional preparation time (Klymova et al., 2023; Kuzmina et al., 2021). In this setting, digital platforms enabled individualized support in a low resource environment, demonstrating contextual adaptability of blended learning. It also suggests that innovation in blended instruction does not depend on sophisticated technology.

Beyond mere practice opportunities, the analysis also highlights the importance of feedback mechanisms in developing speaking competence. Personalized feedback loops were particularly impactful in fostering learner autonomy, echoing findings from AI-supported instruction research where individualized input improves students' sense of progress and motivates further practice (Al-Khresheh, 2024; Li et al., 2025; Torres & Kahveci, 2025). While this study did not directly implement AI tools, the structured feedback mechanisms emulated similar principles of personalization and responsiveness, reinforcing the relevance of feedback driven design. Studies on digital storytelling and collaborative online activities similarly emphasize the role of responsive input in shaping learners' engagement and identity as English speakers (Yu & Wang, 2025; Amante, 2025). These findings point to a convergence between blended learning research and emerging work on learning analytics and AI-driven pedagogy, where personalized scaffolding is central to learner development.

Another important implication relates to the instructors' ability to manage learner diversity in blended settings. The student group in this study consisted of gap year senior high school graduates, junior workers, and university students aged 18 to 22 year old. This created a variety of expectation and level of communicative confidence. The flexibility of the blended learning supported classroom with differentiated pacing and multiple modes of expression. Asynchronous practice allowed quieter students more time to plan, whereas

offline discussions promoted peer negotiation of meaning and spontaneous language use. Previous studies have pointed out that blended environments can facilitate the integration of diverse learner profiles when instructors curate modality specific tasks (Burimskaya & Frolova, 2023; Khan & Khan, 2024). The results of present study suggest that instructors' teaching competence and pedagogical intentionality are decisive factors in navigating their classroom diversity. This aligns with research calling for teacher centered models of blended course design (Biletska et al., 2021).

Taken together, these results of this study show that the strategic integration of online and offline learnings is central to successful blended speaking instruction. The effectiveness did not only come from technology alone, but also from the instructors' ability to design coherent learning cycles, to use digital platforms to expand communicative space, and to provide targeted support throughout the process. Rather than conceptualizing blended learning as a technological solution, this study underlines the significant of instructors' ability. Both utilize tools to serve their instructional goals supported by meaningful interaction and continuous feedback. This results support a broader trend in the literature emphasizing the shift from blended learnings that emphasize technology to ones that underline pedagogy practice (Sun et al., 2024; Li et al., 2025; Ekizer, 2025). In doing so, this study adds context specific evidence from a private language course in a small town setting. It also contributes to the diversification of blended learning research beyond higher education and large institutional settings.

Pedagogical Implication

The results of this present study suggest several implication for English Language Teaching in blended learning settings as follows:

First, Intentional Integration of Modalities. Instructors are encouraged to design clear pedagogical pathways that connect online tasks with offline communicative activities. Rather than treating digital practice as supplementary, asynchronous speaking tasks should support classroom objectives directly. Short video recordings, voice diaries, and peer feedback on digital platforms allow students to prepare themselves for deeper engagement during online sessions.

Second, Task-based Speaking Activities. The results of this study strengthen the value of task-based instruction in building students communicative competence. Instructors are encouraged to use authentic speaking tasks that reflect real world communicative needs, for example problem solving, opinion exchanges, and mini presentations. Those tasks benefit from pre-task audio modeling and post-task reflection made possible through digital tools.

Third, Feedback Design and Use of Technology. Structured feedback cycles increase students' confidence and their self awareness as language users. Digital platforms offer the instructors to provide specific comments for each student, highlight their pronunciation issues, and trace their progress over repeated attempts. The combination of delayed online feedback with immediate offline scaffolding helps sustained students learning pathways.

Fourth, Supporting Diverse Learners. The context of this present study involved students with varied educational, professional backgrounds, and age. Instructors working with diverse groups should consider flexible pacing, differentiated task complexity, and multiple feedback formats. Blended environments can help accommodate participation by giving quieter students space to prepare and express ideas asynchronously.

Fifth, Professional Development for Instructors. In order to fully utilize blended learning, instructors need to engage in ongoing professional development in digital pedagogy, multimedia feedback, and management of online engagement. Institutions are encouraged to provide structured training in task design, multimodal instruction, and technological fluency which aligned with research-based frameworks for blended language teaching.

Sixth, Instruction with flexible resources. The private course setting shows that impactful blended learning does not demand high-end technology. Simple tools such as voice recording applications, messaging platforms, and classroom presentation systems can be utilized to create meaningful interaction. What matters is pedagogical clarity, not technological sophistication

CONCLUSION

The present research explored how English instructors design and apply pedagogical strategies to improve speaking skills in a blended learning environment. Through classroom observations and semi structured interviews, this study identified three primary instructional approaches that contributed to learners' speaking development: task-based instruction, structured use of digital platforms for asynchronous speaking practice, and personalized feedback mechanisms. The strategies enabled instructors to balance the affordances of online and offline instruction while maintaining meaningful interaction and communicative focus.

The findings of this study indicate that the strategic integration of modalities enhance students' speaking fluency, their confidence, and their willingness to participate. The blended format gave students room to advance at their own pace, especially through repeated practice opportunities and feedback loops supported by digital tools. At the same time, offline interaction created space for real time negotiation of meaning, collaborative learning, and affective support. The study demonstrates that blended learning can be a productive approach for communicative skill development when instructors intentionally scaffold both online and offline tasks.

The study contributes to existing literature by offering empirical insights from a private language course context in a small town, which remains underrepresented in blended learning research. While prior studies have largely focused on higher education environments or large-scale implementations, this research shows how blended strategies operate in a resource constrained local setting with a variety of student background and age. These findings suggest that effective blended instruction is not necessarily dependent on advanced infrastructure, but rather on informed pedagogical decision-making.

Further research is recommended to examine the longitudinal impact of blended learning on speaking proficiency and to explore learner agency, motivation, and identity formation within technology-mediated interaction. Future research may also compare instructor driven strategies with student led approaches, and address how emerging artificial intelligence tools can support personalized speaking development.

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