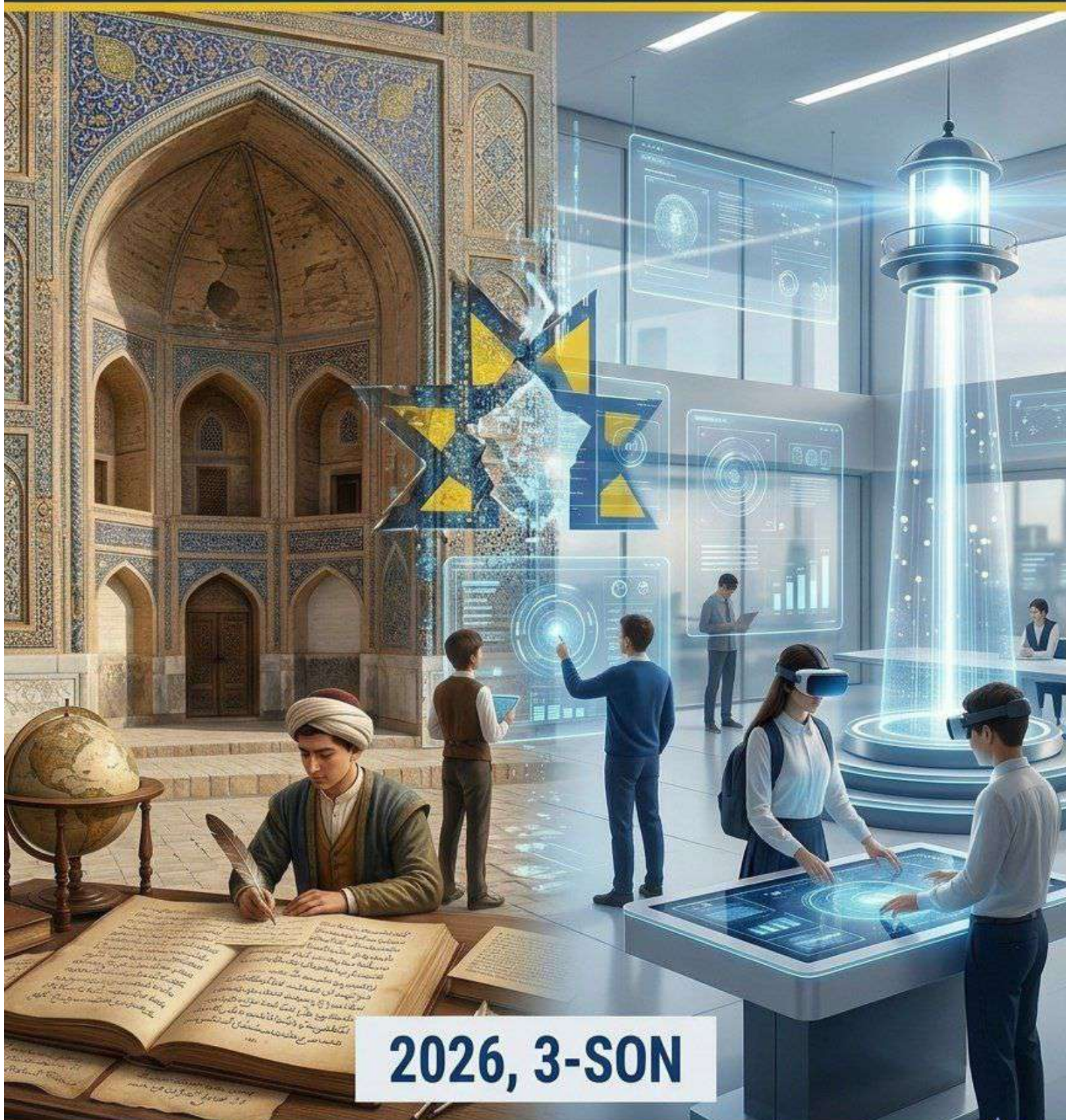




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DEVELOPING EFL LEARNERS' SPEAKING AND WRITING SKILLS THROUGH BLENDED LEARNING

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Abstract: Speaking and writing—the two productive skills—are widely regarded as the most crucial competencies for learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), largely because foreign-language settings provides limited authentic exposure and few opportunities for sustained, meaningful information. Blended learning, defined as the thoughtful integration of face-to-face instruction with online learning so that the strengths of each are combined, has emerged as a leading response to this difficulty. This article reviews the conceptual basis of blended learning and synthesises recent empirical research on its effect on EFL speaking and writing. Drawing on the Community of Inquiry framework and sociocultural theory, it discusses that blended designs expand opportunities for input, interaction, output, and feedback well beyond the constraints of the standard classrooms. The article proposes a practical flipped-and-blended model for the productive skills, examines recurring implementation difficulties—including digital access, learner autonomy, and teacher workload—and offers evidence-informed recommendations for teachers. It deduces that blended learning is most effective not when technology is solely added to existing practice, but when in-person and online components are redesigned around a coherent pedagogy of communicative output and repetitive feedback.

Keywords: blended learning; EFL; speaking skills; writing skills; productive skills; Community of Inquiry; flipped classroom; computer-assisted language learning

Introduction

Across foreign-language education, the productive skills of speaking and writing remain the most resistant to development. Unlike the receptive skills of listening and reading, productive performance requires learners to retrieve and assemble linguistic resources under real-time or quasi-real-time pressure, and it exposes gaps in vocabulary, grammar, and discourse organisation that comprehension can mask. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts in particular, where the language is rarely encountered outside the classroom, learners typically receive limited opportunity to produce extended spoken or written output and even less individualised feedback on what they produce. Writing has frequently been described as the slowest-developing and most difficult of the four skills for EFL learners, and speaking is often restricted by large class sizes, anxiety, and scarce talk time per student.

Over the last two decades, blended learning has come to be seen as a useful means of addressing these constraints. Rather than treating the lesson as a single bounded event, blended learning extends the learning environment across face-to-face and online spaces, allowing input, practice, interaction, and feedback to be distributed in time and place. The approach gained additional momentum during the COVID-19 disruption, when institutions around the world were compelled to combine remote and classroom instruction, and it has since revised into a mainstream design paradigm rather than an emergency measure.

This article examines how blended learning can be designed to develop EFL learners' speaking and writing specifically. It first clarifies what blended learning is and is not, and

reviews simple design models. It then sets out a theoretical rational grounded in the Community of Inquiry framework and sociocultural theory. The central sections synthesise the latest study on blended speaking and blended writing instruction and translate the findings into a practical model. The article closes by considering implementation challenges and giving recommendations for practice. The overall argument is that the benefits of blending arise not from technology itself but from the deliberate redesign of instruction around communicative output and iterative, formative feedback.

Conceptualising Blended Learning

Blended learning is most commonly defined as the thoughtful integration of face-to-face and online learning experiences such that the strengths of each are gathered with a coherent learning activity appropriate to the subject and the learners (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008). This definition is purposely qualitative rather than quantitative: blending is not only a matter of changing a fixed percentage of class time with online activity, but of rethinking course design so that each mode does what it does best. Face-to-face time is reserved for spontaneous communication, negotiation of meaning, and high-stakes performance, while the online environment helps flexible input, asynchronous practice, reflection, and individualized feedback.

Garrison and Kanuka (2004) describe the potential of blended learning as transformative rather than additive: its value lies in fundamentally reconceiving the relationship between class contact and independent study, not in bolting digital resources onto an unchanged syllabus. In the language-teaching literature, Sharma and Barrett (2007) similarly frame blended learning as the principled use of technology in and outside the classroom, where the technology serves clearly defined pedagogical purposes. Graham (2006) distinguishes blending at the activity, course, programme, and institutional levels, a reminder that blended designs can operate at very different scales.

Common blended models in language teaching

Several recurring configurations are useful for EFL course designers:

The flipped classroom, in which learners find new input—grammar explanations, vocabulary, model texts, or listening material—online before class, freeing scarce contact time for interactive production and feedback. This model is especially well suited to the productive skills, because it converts the lesson into a workshop for output rather than a lecture about language.

The rotation or station model, in which learners alternate between teacher-led face-to-face tasks and online self-access activities within or across sessions.

The supplemental model, in which the core remains face-to-face while an online platform (a learning management system, a discussion board, or a writing tool) extends practice, hosts feedback, and stores resources.

Telecollaboration and project-based blends, in which learners interact with partners or audiences beyond the classroom—through shared documents, voice tools, or online exchange—to give communicative tasks an authentic purpose and readership. These models are not mutually exclusive; effective courses often combine them. What matters for the productive skills is that the online component genuinely extends opportunities for output and feedback rather than merely delivering content. Two complementary theoretical strands explain why well-designed blended environments can support the productive skills.

The Community of Inquiry frameworkThe Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2000) was developed to describe how deep, collaborative learning occurs in online and blended settings. It identifies three interdependent elements:

teaching presence (the design, facilitation, and direction of the learning experience), social presence (the capacity of participants to project themselves and communicate as real people in the community), and cognitive presence (the extent to which learners construct and confirm meaning through sustained reflection and discourse). Garrison and Vaughan (2008) argue that blended learning is particularly well positioned to develop all three presences, because the face-to-face channel builds the social and teaching presence that anchors a community, while the online channel sustains the reflective, written discourse that supports cognitive presence over time.

For the productive skills this framework is directly relevant. Speaking development depends heavily on social presence and the willingness to communicate; writing development depends on cognitive presence and the iterative, reflective construction of meaning. A blended design that maintains strong teaching presence—clear tasks, visible facilitation, and timely feedback—across both channels can therefore support speaking and writing in mutually reinforcing ways.

Sociocultural and output-oriented perspectives

Sociocultural theory, following Vygotsky (1978), holds that language develops through socially mediated activity and that learners can perform within a zone of proximal development with appropriate support before they can perform independently. Blended environments multiply the sources of such mediation: peers, teachers, model texts, automated tools, and recorded resources can all scaffold performance. Complementing this, output-oriented views of second-language acquisition emphasise that producing language—being pushed to speak and write—drives learners to notice gaps in their knowledge, test hypotheses about the language, and develop fluency and accuracy. Blended designs are valuable precisely because they expand both the quantity of output learners produce and the quality of feedback they receive on it.

Developing Speaking Skills through Blended Learning

Speaking is constrained in conventional EFL classrooms by limited individual talk time, affective barriers such as anxiety, and the transience of spoken performance, which makes feedback difficult. Blended learning can solve each of these constraints. Expanding opportunities for output Asynchronous voice and video tools allow every learner produces extended spoken output without competing for floor time, and to do so when they feel ready rather than under classroom pressure. Audio discussion platforms, voice-recording assignments, and short video tasks let learners rehearse, record, and re-record, which lowers anxiety and raises the volume of practice. Research in blended speaking instruction has reported significant gains where multimodal input—combining text, audio, and video—is integrated with opportunities to produce and review spoken output. At the same time, the evidence is not uniform: some studies report only modest differences between blended and traditional speaking instruction, with outcomes depending strongly on learner participation, task design, and proficiency level. The lesson for designers is that the online channel must be structured to require and support genuine spoken production, not merely to host materials.

Synchronous interaction and negotiation of meaning

Video conferencing and synchronous online discussion extend interactive speaking beyond the classroom and enable telecollaboration with speakers in other locations. Such interaction creates authentic communicative purpose and pushes learners to negotiate meaning in real time. When combined with face-to-face sessions that build rapport and provide direct correction, synchronous online interaction can strengthen both fluency and the willingness

to communicate.

Feedback on speaking

Recorded spoken output is a powerful affordance because, unlike live classroom speech, it can be reviewed, annotated, and revisited. Teachers can give targeted feedback on specific recordings; learners can engage in self-assessment by listening to their own performance; and peers can comment asynchronously. Automatic speech tools can additionally provide low-stakes practice with pronunciation and pacing. The combination of repeated, reviewable output and individualised feedback is the central mechanism through which blended designs

improve speaking.

Developing Writing Skills through Blended Learning

Writing is widely identified as the most challenging skill for EFL learners because it integrates control of grammar, vocabulary, cohesion, genre, and rhetorical organisation, and because the process-oriented approach it demands—planning, drafting, revising, and editing—requires time that conventional class schedules rarely allow. Blended learning is especially well matched to writing instruction.

Supporting the writing process

The process approach to writing maps naturally onto a blended structure. Brainstorming and planning can be carried out collaboratively online; drafting can take place asynchronously at the learner’s own pace; and face-to-face time can be devoted to mini-lessons, peer review, and teacher conferencing. Shared online documents make multiple drafts visible and allow revision history to be tracked, which renders the otherwise invisible process of revision concrete and teachable.

Studies of blended university writing courses have generally reported that learners in blended conditions perform those in fully traditional conditions on writing measures, and that they tend to produce longer and more grammatically complicated texts when supported by multimodal information and online practice.

Feedback, peer review, and collaboration

Feedback is the engine of writing development, and the online channel multiplies the channels through which it can be delivered. Discussion boards and shared documents support peer reviews, giving learners an authentic audience and prompting them to read each other’s work critically. Online platforms allow teachers to provide written feedback efficiently and to reuse comments across common error types. Collaborative writing on shared documents fosters social and cognitive presence simultaneously, as learners negotiate wording and structure together. Web-based tools such as supplementary learning platforms have been shown to improve paragraph and essay-level writing when used to structure feedback and extend practice beyond class.

The role of automated and AI-assisted tools Automated writing-evaluation tools and, increasingly, generative AI assistants offer instant feedback on grammar, vocabulary, and cohesion, allowing learners to revise before submitting work for human checking. Used judiciously, these tools relieve teachers of surface-level correction and free face-to-face time for higher-order concerns such as argument and organisation. The important condition is that automated feedback should scaffold rather than replace the learner’s own revising and the teacher’s formative judgement; over-reliance risks displacing the productive struggle through which writing competence develops. Clear guidance on appropriate use, and tasks that require learners to evaluate and justify the suggestions they accept, help keep these tools in a supporting

role.

A Practical Blended Model for the Productive Skills

The following flipped-and-blended cycle integrates the principles above into a structure that course designers can adapt. It treats each unit as a movement from input through output to feedback, distributed deliberately across online and face-to-face.

Input

Learners study model dialogues or texts, target language, and short videos; complete comprehension and noticing tasks at their own pace.

Brief clarification of difficulties; activation of prior knowledge; framing of the tasks.

Output

Speaking: record an individual or paired voice/video task. Writing: produce a first draft in a shared document.

Interactive performance: information-gap and discussion tasks for speaking; collaborative planning and peer review for writing

Feedback
Teacher and peer comments on recordings and drafts; optional automated feedback; learner self-assessment.

Targeted whole-class feedback on common patterns; one-to-one conferencing; modelling of revision.

Revision

Learners re-record or redraft, responding explicitly to feedback; reflect on what changed and why.

Showcase of improved performance; consolidation; transfer to a new related task.

The defining feature of this cycle is that the online and face-to-face components are interdependent rather than parallel. Online input prepares learners for richer face-to-face interaction; face-to-face feedback informs online revision. Each productive performance is followed by reviewable feedback and a genuine opportunity to revise, which is the mechanism most consistently associated with gains in both speaking and writing.

Challenges and Limitations

Despite consistently positive learner attitudes, blended learning is not a guaranteed improvement, and several challenges recur in the research.

Digital access and equity. Unequal access to reliable internet connectivity and suitable devices remains a significant barrier, particularly in some EFL contexts, and can exclude precisely the learners who most need support.

Learner autonomy and engagement. The asynchronous components depend on self-regulation. Where learners participate inconsistently, gains evaporate; studies of text-only online writing tutorials, for instance, have found no improvement when participation and focus were low. Designs must therefore build in accountability and motivation, not assume autonomy.

Teacher workload and readiness. Designing coherent blended courses and giving timely feedback across two channels is demanding. Teacher digital competence and institutional support are decisive, and inadequate preparation is a common cause of disappointing results.

Alignment of tools and objectives. Technology adds value only when it serves clearly defined learning goals. Tools chosen for novelty rather than purpose tend to fragment attention and dilute the productive focus.

Quality and integrity of automated feedback. Over-reliance on automated or AI tools can short-circuit the productive struggle essential to writing development and raises questions of academic integrity that courses must address explicitly.

The conflicting findings in the literature—strong gains in some studies, negligible differences in others—are best read not as evidence that blending does not work, but as evidence that its effectiveness is conditional on design quality, learner engagement, and contextual fit.

Recommendations for Practice

Several evidence-informed principles follow for those designing blended EFL courses focused on the productive skills. Redesign, do not add. Reallocate face-to-face time to interactive output and feedback, and use the online channel for input and individual practice, rather than layering technology onto an unchanged syllabus. Build every cycle around output and revision. Ensure each unit requires learners to produce reviewable spoken or written output and to revise it in response to feedback. Maintain teaching presence across both channels. Provide clear task design, visible facilitation, and timely formative feedback online as well as in class. Design for engagement and accountability. Use deadlines, low-stakes recurring tasks, peer interaction, and authentic audiences to sustain participation in

asynchronous components.

Integrate feedback from multiple sources. Combine teacher, peer, self, and—where appropriate—automated feedback, keeping automated tools in a scaffolding role. Attend to access and support. Anticipate connectivity and device constraints, offer low-bandwidth alternatives, and provide induction so that learners and teachers can use the tools confidently.

Conclusion

Speaking and writing are the skills in which EFL learners most need expanded opportunity to produce language and to receive feedback on it, and they are precisely the skills that the conventional classroom is least able to support at scale. Blended learning offers a principled response by distributing input, output, interaction, and feedback across face-to-face and online environments so that each does what it does best. The Community of Inquiry framework and sociocultural theory together explain why: blended designs can sustain teaching, social, and cognitive presence while multiplying the channels for mediated, output-driven practice. The empirical record is broadly encouraging, especially for writing, but it is also conditional—gains depend on coherent design, genuine learner engagement, capable teachers, and equitable access. The central implication is that blended learning succeeds not when technology is added to teaching but when teaching is redesigned around communicative output and iterative feedback.

Future work would benefit from larger and longer studies, attention to a wider range of genres and proficiency levels, and closer investigation of how emerging AI-assisted tools can be integrated without displacing the productive effort through which the skills actually develop.

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