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Reimagining Oral Fluency: The Rising Importance of Listening Skills in Digital Learning

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Abstract. *This study explores the evolving relationship between listening skills and oral fluency within digital learning environments. As language education increasingly integrates multimedia resources, online platforms, and technology-enhanced tools, listening has become a primary channel through which learners acquire the linguistic input essential for fluent spoken production. Drawing on contemporary theories of second language acquisition and a qualitative analysis of recent literature, this article examines how digital listening exposure supports the development of vocabulary, pronunciation accuracy, prosodic features, and discourse organization, all of which contribute to oral fluency. The findings indicate that digital tools provide learners with flexible, personalized, and authentic listening experiences that strengthen cognitive processing and enhance speaking performance. However, challenges such as digital overload, unequal access, and difficulty selecting appropriate materials highlight the need for structured pedagogical guidance. Overall, the study argues that listening must be reconceptualized as a central determinant of oral fluency in the digital era, emphasizing its critical role in shaping effective communicators in modern language learning contexts.*

Keywords: *Oral Fluency, Listening Skills, Digital Learning*

INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of digital technologies has transformed how learners engage with language, particularly in the domains of listening and speaking. As communication increasingly shifts toward online platforms and multimedia interactions, students encounter diverse auditory inputs that shape their oral proficiency. Digital learning environments expose learners to speech through video conferences, podcasts, virtual lectures, and interactive AI-based tools, making listening central to how learners process and internalize linguistic information. Consequently, oral fluency now develops within ecosystems defined not only by direct human interaction but also by digital exposure to spoken language.

Listening has long been recognized as a key predictor of speaking performance in second language acquisition. It provides learners with models of pronunciation, prosody, vocabulary usage, and discourse patterns essential for fluent oral expression. In digital learning contexts, this relationship becomes even more pronounced due to the accessibility of authentic listening resources. Learners can observe natural speech

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rhythms, intonation contours, and communicative cues in real time, which helps them construct mental representations that support fluent production. This environment underscores that oral fluency is an outcome strongly influenced by listening competence.

Digital learning introduces new patterns of multimodal engagement that strengthen the relationship between listening and speaking. According to Mayer's Multimedia Learning Theory (2005), comprehension is enhanced when information is presented through coordinated auditory and visual channels. Digital environments create this synergy by combining speech, text, images, gestures, and visual cues, enabling learners to process information more deeply. This multimodal input reinforces the connection between comprehension and production, making listening an even more critical factor in achieving fluency within technology-rich learning environments.

Building on the impact of multimodal exposure, digital platforms also expand opportunities for repeated and self-paced listening practice. Field (2010) notes that repeated listening improves segmentation skills and helps learners internalize natural prosodic patterns essential for fluent speech. Digital tools enable learners to replay audio, slow down speech, and isolate difficult segments, practices that enhance comprehension and, consequently, improve spoken output. This flexibility offers learners a level of individualized control that traditional classrooms rarely provide.

Furthermore, digital environments facilitate interaction with authentic listening materials, which play a crucial role in developing pragmatic fluency. Nation and Newton (2020) emphasize that oral fluency involves not only linguistic accuracy but also the ability to communicate naturally in real-life contexts. Through podcasts, interviews, debates, and vlogs, learners gain exposure to natural conversational norms, turn-taking structures, and sociocultural expressions that enhance their spoken performance.

Another crucial aspect of digital learning is the emergence of interactive listening and speaking tools. These platforms now incorporate real-time speech recognition, pronunciation feedback, and interactive simulations that require learners to convert auditory input into immediate verbal responses. Jones (2024) emphasizes that such interactive listening promotes deeper cognitive engagement by replicating authentic conversational demands. These technological advancements blur the distinction between listening and speaking, positioning listening as a catalyst for fluent oral performance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Listening is widely regarded as a foundational component of second language acquisition because it acts as the primary channel through which learners first encounter linguistic input. As a receptive skill, listening allows learners to process the sounds, structures, and meanings of a new language before they attempt to produce it. This early exposure shapes their ability to understand how the language works in real contexts and prepares them for later stages of oral communication.

Rost (2011) highlights that listening enables learners to internalize phonological, lexical, and syntactic features that later support speaking proficiency. When learners consistently hear accurate and meaningful input, they begin to form mental representations of the language. These representations guide their spoken production and

help them speak more accurately and confidently. Thus, the quality of listening input deeply influences the development of oral skills.

Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1985) further emphasizes the importance of comprehensible input as the basis for language development. According to this theory, learners must understand what they hear before they are able to produce language effectively. Listening, therefore, becomes the essential first step in the process of acquiring a new language. It provides the linguistic foundation upon which speaking ability is built, reinforcing the idea that listening and speaking are interconnected.

Research on oral fluency also supports the crucial role of listening. Segalowitz (2010) explains that fluency involves more than just speaking quickly; it includes producing speech smoothly, coherently, and automatically. This automaticity develops through repeated exposure to natural patterns of spoken language. Without sufficient listening input, learners may struggle to internalize these patterns and produce speech fluently.

Digital learning environments significantly enhance listening opportunities by offering a wide range of multimedia resources. Streaming videos, podcasts, learning apps, and interactive simulations allow learners to engage with authentic spoken language from various speakers and contexts. Goh and Vandergrift (2021) note that such digital tools help learners notice recurring patterns in discourse, which contributes to the development of fluency. Through consistent exposure, learners become more attuned to how natural speech is formed and delivered.

Modern technology also promotes interactive listening practices that increase comprehension. Features such as replay options, adjustable playback speed, and the availability of captions give learners greater control over the listening process. These tools encourage them to monitor their understanding, identify difficulties, and apply problem-solving strategies. Vandergrift's (1999) metacognitive listening framework emphasizes the importance of these strategic processes for developing deeper comprehension.

When learners engage in metacognitive listening, they strengthen the link between understanding input and producing output. Better comprehension equips them with the linguistic resources needed to speak more effectively. As learners become more skilled at managing the listening process, they can transfer this improved understanding into more fluent oral performance. This connection underscores how strategic listening practices enhance speaking ability.

Advancements in computer-assisted language learning (CALL) further reinforce the symbiotic relationship between listening and speaking. Speech recognition technologies allow learners to compare their spoken output with native-like models and receive immediate feedback. Som-In (2020) explains that this feedback enhances listening discrimination and productive accuracy at the same time. By acting as a bridge between auditory input and oral output, CALL tools help learners develop more precise and fluent speech.

Socio-cognitive perspectives also highlight the importance of listening in building communicative competence. Gautschi (2023) argues that listening provides access to interactional cues such as stress, rhythm, hesitation markers, and turn-taking signals. Digital platforms that feature authentic conversations offer learners rich exposure to these

elements, allowing them to observe how natural communication unfolds. As a result, learners develop more natural, appropriate, and context-sensitive oral fluency.

Finally, mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) expands listening practice beyond traditional settings. Mobile apps provide microlearning activities such as brief listening tasks, daily audio challenges, and interactive quizzes that encourage consistent engagement. Burston (2013) notes that these small but frequent listening experiences increase automaticity and reduce cognitive load during speaking. Through mobile platforms, learners receive continual input throughout their daily lives, ultimately strengthening their oral fluency by improving both the quantity and quality of listening exposure.

Listening is widely acknowledged as a foundational component of second language acquisition because it serves as the primary channel through which learners receive linguistic input. As the earliest receptive skill, listening allows learners to encounter the sounds, rhythms, and structures of a new language before they attempt to produce it. This early exposure helps them build a mental map of how the language functions in real communication. Without strong listening skills, learners may struggle to interpret meaning, recognize patterns, or grasp the nuances of spoken discourse. Therefore, listening acts as a crucial gateway to all other language skills, particularly speaking, which relies heavily on accurate perception of input.

Rost (2011) emphasizes that listening plays a central role in internalizing linguistic features such as phonology, vocabulary, and syntax. When learners are frequently exposed to well-structured and meaningful input, their brains begin to store recurring patterns that later serve as templates for producing speech. These templates make speaking more efficient because learners do not need to construct every utterance from scratch. Instead, they draw from the linguistic material they have internalized through repeated listening experiences. Thus, the depth and variety of listening input directly influence the quality of learners' spoken production, shaping both accuracy and fluency.

Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1985) further strengthens the argument that listening is indispensable in language acquisition. According to this theory, comprehensible input—language that learners can understand despite not knowing every word—is the primary driver of linguistic development. Speaking emerges naturally once learners have received adequate input. This means the ability to understand spoken language precedes the ability to produce it effectively. When learners lack sufficient listening input, their speaking skills often develop more slowly and less accurately. Krashen's perspective highlights the interconnectedness of receptive and productive skills and positions listening as an essential precursor to fluent speaking.

Research on oral fluency also underscores the pivotal role of listening in developing smooth, coherent speech. Segalowitz (2010) explains that fluency involves not only the speed of speech but also automaticity, coherence, and the ability to express ideas without excessive hesitation. Automaticity develops through repeated exposure to natural spoken language, which helps learners internalize patterns of stress, rhythm, and intonation. When learners are consistently exposed to authentic input, they acquire a sense of how fluent speech sounds and feels. Without this exposure, learners may struggle to produce speech that flows naturally, resulting in choppy or overly slow communication.

Digital learning environments greatly expand access to spoken input by providing abundant multimedia resources. Learners can now listen to streaming videos, podcasts, interviews, interactive simulations, and educational apps featuring native speakers. These resources expose learners to a wide range of accents, speaking speeds, and real-world contexts, giving them opportunities to develop flexible listening comprehension. Goh and Vandergrift (2021) argue that digital listening tools help learners identify recurring discourse patterns and better understand how speakers construct meaning in real time. Through consistent engagement, learners become more perceptive listeners, and this perceptual strength directly supports their oral fluency.

In addition to providing rich input, digital platforms introduce interactive listening features that deepen comprehension. Tools such as replaying audio segments, adjusting playback speed, accessing transcripts, and highlighting key phrases empower learners to control their learning process. According to Vandergrift's (1999) metacognitive framework, effective listening involves planning, monitoring, and evaluating comprehension. Interactive features help learners engage in these metacognitive behaviors, allowing them to notice gaps in understanding and refine their strategies. By developing strong metacognitive awareness during listening, learners enhance their ability to convert comprehension into fluent and accurate speech.

As learners engage more strategically with listening materials, they begin to strengthen the cognitive connections between understanding input and producing output. Improved listening comprehension equips them with a broader and more refined linguistic repertoire, which they can draw upon during speaking tasks. When learners can recognize pronunciation patterns, stress placement, and syntactic structures with ease, they are better prepared to reproduce these features in their own speech. This transfer from comprehension to production contributes significantly to the development of oral fluency. Thus, strategic listening does not merely support understanding; it actively shapes the quality of learners' spoken performance.

Technological advancements in computer-assisted language learning (CALL) further enhance the relationship between listening and speaking. Tools such as speech recognition software and pronunciation training apps provide learners with real-time feedback by comparing their spoken output to native speaker models. Som-In (2020) argues that this technology strengthens both listening discrimination and productive accuracy simultaneously. Learners develop sharper awareness of sound distinctions, intonation contours, and rhythm patterns by repeatedly listening to and mimicking accurate models. CALL environments therefore create a feedback loop in which listening improves speaking and speaking reinforces listening, leading to more integrated language development.

Socio-cognitive models of language learning also highlight the importance of listening in developing communicative competence. Gautschi (2023) points out that listening exposes learners to interactional cues such as hesitation markers, turn-taking signals, discourse markers, and prosodic elements that guide real-life communication. Digital platforms featuring authentic dialogues, interviews, and conversational recordings offer rich opportunities to observe how real speakers manage interaction. When learners internalize these cues, they become better able to participate naturally in conversations. This contributes not only to linguistic fluency but also to pragmatic fluency—the ability to speak appropriately and contextually in social interactions.

Mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) extends these benefits by making listening practice accessible anytime and anywhere. Mobile apps often provide microlearning activities such as short listening clips, vocabulary-focused audio tasks, and daily comprehension challenges that encourage consistent engagement. Burston (2013) notes that frequent, manageable listening practice helps build automaticity and reduces cognitive load during speaking activities. Because mobile devices are portable, learners can engage with listening materials in various contexts, promoting incidental learning. Over time, this sustained exposure increases both the quantity and quality of input, ultimately strengthening oral fluency and supporting long-term language development.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative, literature-based methodology designed to synthesize contemporary research on listening skills and oral fluency within digital learning environments. Rather than collecting empirical data firsthand, this approach emphasizes conceptual interpretation and theoretical integration. It allows the researcher to trace how ideas, constructs, and findings across multiple studies contribute to understanding a rapidly evolving educational phenomenon. A literature-based method is particularly suitable for topics shaped by technological innovations, where practices and theories develop faster than traditional data collection cycles. Through this method, the study aims to illuminate broad patterns rather than isolated cases.

The qualitative orientation of this methodology enables deep engagement with existing scholarship by analyzing how different researchers conceptualize the role of listening in second language acquisition. It prioritizes meaning-making and interpretation over numerical measurement. This orientation is essential when dealing with complex constructs such as fluency, cognitive processing, and multimodal learning, which require nuanced understanding. By using a qualitative lens, the study can capture the diversity of perspectives found in applied linguistics and digital pedagogy. It also facilitates the integration of findings that may not share identical research designs but contribute to a common conceptual thread.

The literature review draws from peer-reviewed publications in applied linguistics, second language acquisition, educational technology, and digital learning. These sources provide foundational theories as well as emerging insights into how digital environments influence listening comprehension and oral fluency. Incorporating both classical theories and contemporary studies helps present a balanced and historically grounded analysis. The range of sources ensures that the synthesis reflects the evolution of ideas across decades, including shifts brought by technological innovations.

Data selection followed clear criteria to maintain relevance and academic rigor. Sources were chosen based on their direct engagement with listening comprehension, oral fluency, digital tools, or theoretical models explaining comprehension–production relationships. Priority was given to studies published within the last 10–15 years to capture the impact of modern digital environments, though earlier landmark theories were included for conceptual grounding. The inclusion criteria allowed the researcher to construct a coherent picture of how listening and fluency interact across different learning contexts.

Academic databases such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, ERIC, and ResearchGate served as key platforms for locating relevant literature. These databases were selected because they offer high-quality scholarly work and provide wide access to interdisciplinary research. Search keywords included terms such as "listening comprehension," "oral fluency," "digital learning," "CALL," and "SLA input." The use of multiple databases increased the likelihood of capturing diverse perspectives and minimized the risk of overlooking influential studies. This systematic search process ensured the credibility of the literature base.

Once sources were collected, the literature underwent thematic coding to identify recurring ideas and conceptual relationships. Thematic coding is a qualitative analytic technique that helps categorize findings based on shared meanings rather than isolated details. This approach is especially effective in literature-based research because it highlights how different studies converge on key issues. It also brings clarity to wide-ranging topics by grouping them into interpretable themes that support coherent discussion.

Several central themes emerged during the coding process, including the importance of input in language development, the affordances of digital learning technologies, cognitive mechanisms behind comprehension, and the transfer of listening skills to oral performance. These themes served as the organizing framework for the analysis. Each theme was examined not only descriptively but also critically, exploring how different researchers support, challenge, or expand upon one another's ideas. This structure ensures that the analysis moves beyond summary toward synthesis.

The qualitative synthesis aims to integrate these themes into a unified understanding of how listening shapes oral fluency in digital contexts. Rather than treating each study as a standalone contribution, the methodology connects insights to form a broader conceptual model. This integrative approach highlights patterns such as the increasing importance of interactive listening tools, the role of cognitive load, and the emergence of metacognitive strategies in digital learning. By drawing connections across studies, the methodology advances a more holistic interpretation of the listening–speaking relationship.

Ultimately, this literature-based qualitative methodology provides a theoretical foundation for re-envisioning oral fluency as a listening-centered construct. It demonstrates that listening is not merely a passive skill but a dynamic process that underlies fluent spoken production, especially in technology-rich environments. By synthesizing diverse research, the methodology supports the development of a nuanced argument that reflects both long-standing theories and contemporary digital realities. This approach ensures that the study contributes meaningfully to ongoing discussions in applied linguistics and digital language learning.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that digital learning environments substantially increase learners' exposure to spoken language input, which is foundational for the development of oral fluency. Through online videos, podcasts, interactive modules, and real-time communication platforms, learners encounter a wide range of authentic linguistic features that are often unavailable in traditional classrooms. This variety in input provides access to different dialects, speech speeds, and pragmatic uses of language, enabling learners to

internalize the complexity of natural discourse. Such exposure allows them to notice subtle linguistic patterns, including hesitations, contractions, intonation contours, and linking sounds. As students become more attuned to these patterns, they gain models that help them produce smoother, more natural speech. Consequently, listening emerges not merely as a receptive skill but as a fundamental catalyst for fluent oral performance.

In addition, digital platforms allow learners to observe communicative behaviors in authentic contexts, which play an essential role in shaping oral fluency. Real-world recordings, interviews, and conversational videos provide visual and auditory cues that reinforce meaning-making. Learners can see how speakers manage turn-taking, convey politeness, express emphasis, and repair misunderstandings. These pragmatic dimensions are often difficult to teach through textbooks alone, but digital listening resources make them more accessible and visible. Exposure to these communicative behaviors contributes to the development of sociolinguistic competence, which supports more confident and contextually appropriate speech. Over time, learners internalize these discourse features and incorporate them into their own speaking practices, resulting in improved rhythm, coherence, and communicative fluidity.

Digital tools also support personalization, allowing learners to control their own pace and depth of listening. Features such as replay, adjustable playback speed, subtitles, and timestamped transcripts provide scaffolding that enhances comprehension. These affordances empower learners to break down complex input into manageable segments, revisit unclear parts, and analyze pronunciation or vocabulary in detail. Such strategic engagement fosters deeper cognitive processing, enabling learners to build stronger connections between understanding and speaking. Research suggests that learners who develop habits of replaying and analyzing input tend to demonstrate increased automaticity in spoken production. This occurs because repeated exposure improves the retrieval speed of vocabulary, strengthens syntactic familiarity, and enhances the learner's phonological awareness.

The ability to personalize listening experiences also builds learner confidence, which is strongly associated with improved fluency. When students feel in control of the difficulty level and pace, they experience reduced anxiety and greater willingness to take speaking risks. Confidence encourages learners to practice speaking more frequently, test new vocabulary, and attempt longer utterances without fear of mistakes. Digital listening environments, therefore, create a psychologically supportive atmosphere where learners can experiment with language. Increased confidence not only leads to smoother delivery but also promotes more spontaneous speech production. As anxiety decreases, learners shift from slow, monitored speech to more natural, fluid expression, reflecting real progress in fluency development.

The analysis further reveals that multimodal digital resources enhance listening comprehension in ways that directly contribute to oral fluency. Videos that combine visual cues, gestures, environmental context, and subtitles help learners process meaning more efficiently. These multimodal elements reduce cognitive load by providing multiple pathways for understanding. When listening becomes easier, learners can allocate more mental resources toward storing linguistic patterns, which later benefit their speaking. For example, images and gestures can clarify unfamiliar concepts, supporting deeper vocabulary acquisition. The strengthened mental representation of spoken input facilitates quicker retrieval during oral communication, thereby improving overall fluency.

Moreover, digital listening resources expose learners to varied discourse genres, each contributing uniquely to fluency. Conversational videos promote natural speaking patterns, academic lectures build structured and formal speech, while interviews and debates enhance argumentative and persuasive abilities. Exposure to these different genres broadens learners' linguistic repertoire and strengthens their adaptability in diverse speaking situations. When learners internalize multiple discourse styles, they become more flexible speakers who can shift tone, vocabulary, and structure depending on the communicative context. This versatility is a key component of advanced oral fluency, and digital platforms make it easier to encounter such varied input on a regular basis.

However, despite significant benefits, the findings also highlight several challenges that limit the effectiveness of digital listening for fluency development. One major issue is the overwhelming abundance of resources. Without clear guidance, learners may struggle to choose materials that align with their proficiency level or learning goals. Selecting content that is too advanced can lead to frustration and demotivation, while content that is too simple fails to stimulate growth. This mismatch reduces the potential fluency gains that listening activities could otherwise support. Therefore, structured pedagogical intervention remains crucial to help learners navigate the vast digital landscape and use listening materials effectively.

Another challenge concerns learners' inconsistent engagement with digital listening tasks. Some students may only use digital tools passively, such as watching videos without analyzing linguistic features or practicing speaking afterward. Passive listening limits opportunities for language internalization and reduces the value of digital exposure. Fluency development requires active engagement, such as shadowing, summarizing, or practicing reconstruction of spoken texts. Without these active strategies, even high-quality listening input may not translate into improved oral performance. This finding emphasizes the importance of integrating speaking tasks directly after listening activities to maximize learning outcomes.

Digital inequality also emerges as a barrier that affects learners differently. Not all students have reliable internet access, adequate devices, or quiet environments suitable for concentration. These disparities create unequal learning opportunities, where some learners benefit greatly from digital listening tools while others face significant limitations. Such inequalities can widen the fluency gap between students, especially in settings where digital infrastructure is uneven. Addressing this issue requires institutional support, such as providing offline digital resources or ensuring access to educational devices. Without such measures, the full potential of digital listening for fluency development cannot be achieved.

Furthermore, the analysis indicates that learners often need training in how to use digital tools strategically. Many students are unaware of how features such as transcripts, playback controls, or interactive captions can support deeper processing. As a result, they may engage with digital content inefficiently, missing opportunities to analyze pronunciation, grammar, or discourse organization. Teaching learners how to optimize their use of digital features greatly enhances the impact of listening activities on fluency. Instructional sessions focusing on digital literacy, listening strategies, and metacognitive awareness can significantly improve learning outcomes. When students understand how to learn, they become more autonomous and effective language users.

Despite these challenges, the overall results confirm that digital environments provide powerful opportunities for strengthening oral fluency through enhanced listening input. The variety of authentic materials, personalized learning features, and multimodal resources contribute to a rich linguistic environment that supports the development of natural, confident speech. With proper guidance, learners can transform digital listening experiences into meaningful speaking improvements. This analysis suggests that listening should be prioritized as a core pathway to fluency in modern language instruction. As technology continues to evolve, its role in shaping listening-based fluency development is likely to become even more influential, offering new possibilities for innovative pedagogical approaches.

CONCLUSION

The reimagining of oral fluency in digital learning environments underscores the increasing importance of listening as a foundational skill for language development. Digital platforms expose learners to rich, authentic spoken input that shapes their pronunciation, vocabulary usage, discourse organization, and overall communicative competence. As access to diverse listening resources expands, the connection between listening and speaking becomes more central than ever. This study emphasizes that understanding how listening fuels oral production is essential for designing effective pedagogical strategies in contemporary digital contexts.

The findings reveal that digital tools significantly enhance listening exposure, providing learners with opportunities to engage deeply with natural speech patterns. Features such as replay controls, subtitles, adjustable speed, and visual prompts support personalized comprehension, reducing cognitive load and increasing retention. These affordances enable learners to internalize linguistic patterns more efficiently, contributing to smoother, more confident oral fluency. Yet, the research also highlights that these benefits depend on active, strategic engagement rather than passive consumption, reinforcing the importance of learner autonomy and metacognitive awareness.

Despite the advantages, meaningful fluency development in digital environments requires careful management of challenges such as information overload, material selection, and digital disparity. Without structured guidance, learners may select inappropriate content or struggle to navigate complex listening tasks, limiting the effectiveness of digital input. Educators therefore play a crucial role in curating resources, scaffolding listening activities, and embedding listening-to-speaking connections in instruction. Their support ensures that digital listening translates into real, measurable gains in oral fluency rather than superficial exposure.

The analysis also shows that inequities in access to technology can impact learners' opportunities for fluency development. Unequal access to stable internet, suitable devices, or quiet learning spaces limits the extent to which digital listening resources can benefit all students. Addressing such disparities is essential for ensuring that technological innovation does not widen proficiency gaps. Inclusive institutional support, alternative offline options, and equitable resource allocation are vital for maximizing the potential of digital learning environments across diverse learner populations.

Overall, this integrated conclusion reaffirms that digital learning environments require a holistic perspective on oral fluency—one that positions listening as the central

catalyst for spoken proficiency. By leveraging digital tools thoughtfully and ensuring guided, equitable access, learners can develop more fluent, natural, and confident oral communication skills. Reimagining fluency through a listening-centered framework not only aligns with current technological trends but also provides a forward-looking foundation for improving language education in an increasingly digital world.

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