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Level of Speaking Skill of Yemeni EFL Learners: A Gender Perspective

Rashad Ahmed Fairouz

Department of English Language, Faculty of Education, Ibb University, Yemen

Email: rashadfairouz@yahoo.com

Keywords

*Speaking Skill,
EFL Learners,
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Fluency,
Gender.*

Abstract

This study aimed to identify the level of speaking skill of the third year students of English, Faculty of Education, Ibb University, Yemen, from a gender perspective. To achieve the objectives of the study, an oral test was administered to a sample of 36 students, 11 males and 25 females, selected randomly from the main society of the study (72 students), in the second semester of the academic year 2020-2021, to talk about one topic of 400 words at least. The students' discourses were recorded and then transcribed by the researcher for analysis. The most significant findings of the study showed that the overall level of speaking skill of students was a *pass* (55.25%); and there were statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the speaking skill of male and female students in favor of males attributed to the variable of gender. Based on the findings of the study, a number of pedagogical implications were concluded.

Level of Speaking Skill of Yemeni EFL Learners: A Gender Perspective

مستوى مهارة التحدث لدى الطلبة اليمنيين الدارسين للغة الإنجليزية كلفة أجنبية من منظور النوع الاجتماعي

رشاد أحمد فيروز

قسم اللغة الإنجليزية، كلية التربية، جامعة إب، اليمن

Email: rashadfairooz@yahoo.com

الملخص:	الكلمات المفتاحية:
<p>هدفت الدراسة إلى التعرف على مستوى مهارة التحدث لدى طلبة مستوى ثالث لغة إنجليزية بكلية التربية، جامعة إب، اليمن، من منظور النوع الاجتماعي. ولتحقيق أهداف الدراسة تم اختيار عينة عشوائية مكونة من (36) طالب وطالبة (11 ذكور، 25 إناث) من مجتمع الدراسة البالغ عددهم (72) طالب وطالبة في الفصل الدراسي الثاني للعام الجامعي 2020 - 2021م. وأستخدم الاختبار الشفوي أداة لجمع البيانات من العينة وذلك من خلال التحدث عن أحد المواضيع بما لا يقل عن (400) كلمة. بعد ذلك قام الباحث بتحويل النصوص المسموعة إلى نصوص مكتوبة ومن ثم تحليلها. وكانت أبرز النتائج التي توصلت إليها الدراسة هي: أن مستوى مهارة التحدث لدى الطلبة جاء بتقدير عام مقبول (55.25%)، ووجود فروق ذات دلالة إحصائية بين متوسطات درجات عينة الدراسة في مهارة التحدث - لصالح الذكور - تعزى إلى متغير الجنس. وقدمت الدراسة في ضوء نتائجها العديد من المقترحات التربوية.</p>	<p>مهارة التحدث، طلبة اللغة الإنجليزية كلفة أجنبية، الدقة، النوع الاجتماعي.</p>

1. Introduction

Due to the effective role of the Communicative Language Teaching in the Arab world, Yemen in particular, the speaking skill scores the top priority in teaching among the other language skills in EFL classrooms (Louma, 2004). This rank comes from people's very need to communicate with each other in English verbally especially nowadays, the era of technology. It is true that speaking can provide a complete picture on a speaker's level in the other skills of grammar, vocabulary, and writing. However, it is not an easy skill to be acquired by EFL learners especially in foreign learning environments such as Yemen. Most of jobs prefer interviews, either online or in person, as a test tool for applicants to assess their oral proficiency in English to test their proficiency in the other skills needed. Similarly, most of language tests, e.g., TOEFL, ISLES, proficiency tests, etc., condition a good score, if not the highest, for the speaking skill as being an important skill. This in turn increases the need for Yemeni learners to pay more attention to the speaking skill than the other skills of English to apply for jobs and pass such tests.

As a lecturer at Ibb University, the majority of Yemeni undergraduates of English are poor in the speaking skill. It is not the responsibility of students themselves only but sometimes teachers share in creating such a problem when little attention is paid to train students how to communicate in English naturally and effectively in the classroom. They teach students for merely preparing them for exams (Albino, 2017). This problem makes the speaking skill difficult for students to practice, showing a lack of vocabulary, correct pronunciation, and grammatical sentences (cf. language accuracy) (Harmer, 2001). Accordingly, language dysfluency takes place which is manifested in multiple hesitations, fragmentations, repetitions, and pause fillers while speaking. Based on Ellis' (2009, p. 475) assumption which reads "a proficient speaker will be able to perform tasks

fluently and accurately, using complex language", both accuracy and fluency are tools for assessing the speaking skill. Accordingly, this study attempts to investigate the level of the speaking skill with Yemeni undergraduates of English from a gender perspective to see whether or not the gender affects oral performance.

2. Statement of the Problem

As being spontaneous and transient, the speaking skill becomes difficult for Yemeni EFL learners in general and the third year students of English, Faculty of Education, Ibb University, in particular. This difficulty, according to Wang et al. (2006), is attributed to the lack of both accuracy and fluency in speaking English as a foreign language. Concerning accuracy, the third year students of English show a lack of accuracy in their speaking skill due to the lack of vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar knowledge. The lack of vocabulary knowledge allows them to encounter difficulties in using common words, synonyms, antonyms, idioms, etc. This in turn creates a general problem of "conceptualization" resulting in the difficulty of expressing meanings when they communicate. Concerning pronunciation, uttering words correctly leads to language intelligibility; the case that makes meanings conveyed to listeners clearly. However, mispronouncing words creates a sense of being "wrong, stupid, or incomprehensible" (Brown, 2001, p. 269) which leads to speaking performance interruptions, causing a lack in conveying intended messages to listeners. In effect, listeners encounter a difficulty in comprehending such intended messages. Concerning grammar, the lack of grammar knowledge detains such undergraduates from speaking accurately because constructing sentences is mainly based on grammar rules. This problem makes learners produce broken English; the case that allows listeners to receive distorted messages.

As regards to fluency, the natural use of language produced by a speaker, it is closely

related to accuracy in that the lack of accuracy leads to the lack of fluency. This in turn renders learners to be unnatural when they express themselves in English. Therefore, problems of vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar knowledge create dysfluency with EFL learners.

As a lecturer, teaching speaking courses to Yemeni EFL learners, it is noticed that the level of producing poor spoken English differs from male to female learners despite their similar exposure to the same input in the same time and place. So, this study attempts to study methodologically whether or not there are differences between male and female learners' speaking skill.

3. Research Questions

The main question of this study is: '**what is the level of speaking skill with the third year students of English, Faculty of Education, Ibb University, Yemen, from a gender perspective?**'. To address this question, the following sub-questions should be addressed:

1. What is the overall level of speaking skill with the third year students of English?
2. What is the level of male students' speaking skill?
3. What is the level of female students' speaking skill?
4. Are there any statistically significant differences at the level of $p \leq 0.05$ between the mean score of *male* and *female* students' speaking skill attributed to the variable of gender?

4. Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is **to identify the level of speaking skill with the third year students of English, Faculty of Education, Ibb University, Yemen, from a gender perspective**. To achieve this objective, the following sub-objectives should be achieved:

1. To identify the overall level of speaking skill with the third year students of English.
2. To identify the level of male students' speaking skill.

3. To identify the level of female students' speaking skill.

4. To identify if there are statistically significant differences at the level of $p \leq 0.05$ between the mean score of *male* and *female* students' speaking skill attributed to the variable of gender.

5. Significance of the Study

The significance of this study emanates from the importance of speaking as a skill required by Yemeni EFL learners to be able to work in teaching institutions, companies, factories, etc. For this end, this study is an attempt to show the main problems of speaking English with such learners to be solved appropriately and tangibly. In this sense, the study may equally help both learners and teachers. For learners, it may attract their attention to the very basic features of the speaking skill (i.e., accuracy and fluency) to evaluate their speaking skills and develop them accordingly. In this connection, this study provides a detailed description of these skills and how to be developed. Concerning teachers, the study may draw their attention to the problematic nature of the speaking skill with Yemeni EFL learners in general and the third year of English at Ibb University in particular. This in turn may help them (teachers) in providing appropriate lessons, activities, tasks, etc. for both sexes that help them develop their oral English inside and outside the classroom. Furthermore, they can use suitable teaching methods and techniques that help in introducing what is selected of lessons, activities, etc. in a good way. Finally, the findings of this study can be generalized to other Yemeni universities to pay more attention to the speaking skill together with its sub-skills and the differences between male and female learners to sensitize teachers to select appropriate lessons and teaching methods so as to develop this skill with both sexes. In this relation, they can held workshops to re-consider specifications of speaking courses for related development purposes.

6. Literature Review

6.1. Speaking Skill

To begin with, speaking is an oral productive skill through which systematic verbal expressions are produced to convey meanings (Nunan, 2003). O' Malley and Pierce (1996) argued that speaking refers to negotiation of one's speech to convey meanings and provide an effect on the listener. This means, it is a way of expressing feelings and thoughts through using language. In this relation, Nunan (1989) considered the speaking skill as the most difficult skill for EFL learners for two reasons. First, speaking occurs in the real time to provide information to the waiting listener right then showing pure spontaneity. That is, the listener does not wait for long; the case that requires the speaker to process language in mind as fast as possible. Second, the speaker has no space to revise and edit what is said as it occurs in writing. In the same vein, Luoma (2004) argued that speaking is a very difficult skill which requires some experience and practice to master. For these reasons, Hedge (2000) advised L1 and L2 teachers to pay more attention to language accuracy when teaching the speaking skill to achieve better fluency with students.

6.2. Accuracy

According to Harmer (2001), language accuracy refers to acquisition of (its) pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar knowledge. Below is a description of each skill apart.

6.2.1. Pronunciation

As we all know, Arabic and English differ much in all language systems; phonology is one of them. This exclusively means that sounds that do not exist in Arabic cause great difficulty for Arab/Yemeni EFL learners. According to Goh (2007), pronunciation plays an important role in understanding the speaker's message by the listener. That is, pronunciation takes a greater part in the speaker's intelligibility of message because any

mispronunciation of a single sound of a word may detain the listener's from understanding the word as it appears as another word other than the one intended by the speaker.

Therefore, acquiring pronunciation means having pronunciation knowledge and using it correctly while speaking. This involves, *first*, learning the correct pronunciation of vowel and consonant sounds which enables the speaker to pronounce words correctly as native speakers do. This requires the speaker to perform "speech connectedness" to produce more connected sounds showing modification, omission, and additions or weakening as required when speaking. *Second*, learning phonological rules such as pitch, stress, volume, rhythm, intonation, speed, etc. associated, when necessary, with non-verbal expressions (e.g., facial expressions, nodding, humming, etc.) to produce an effective communication. In so doing, the message is delivered to the listener intelligibly as intended by the speaker.

6.2.2. Vocabulary

Vocabulary for EFL learners is as important as bricks to a building. Speakers of English are required to develop vocabulary knowledge to be able to speak. According to Murphy (2003), vocabulary refers to words of different classes: nouns, verbs, adverbs, adjectives, determiners, prepositions, etc. Each class has its own features morphologically (i.e., form) and syntactically (i.e., position). Morphologically, nouns, for example, end with some suffixes such as "-ment, -ness, -dom, -ity, -tion, -sion, -er, etc."; verbs are ended with "-ing, -ed, -s/es" such as plays, played, playing, etc.; adjectives end with "-able, -less, -ful, -ent, etc." such as careful, helpful, etc. According to Fairouz (2011), vocabulary knowledge means much more than a word meaning; it involves knowing "word aspects" (i.e., phonology, morphology, syntax, orthography, pragmatics, etc.) which cannot be separated from each other. That is, when a learner acquires a word, it means that

s/he knows its meaning, form, usage (function), etc. Words are used in a wide range of contexts showing several distinguishable senses. The meaning of words can be referred to both lexical and grammatical meanings. The two meanings are complementary and interdependent because they solve the ambiguity of some utterances (Lyons, 1977). Regarding the lexical meaning, it deals with *eight* aspects: homonymy (e.g., hyponymy such as *family*), polysemy (e.g., *bank*), synonymy (e.g., *glad* is synonymous with *happy*), antonymy (e.g., *big* – *small*), collocation (e.g., *a need arises*), phrasal verbs (e.g., *look for*), and idioms (e.g., *kick the bucket*). While the grammatical meaning refers to the different forms of the same lexeme. For example, the word *be* has one lexical meaning but it has different forms (*is, was, are, were, am, etc.*). Similarly, the words *girl* and *girls* have the same lexical meaning but they differ in their grammatical meanings, as the former is singular while the latter is plural. In case of sentence meaning, it is "determined partly by the meaning of words (i.e., lexemes) of which it is composed and partly by its grammatical meaning" (Lyons, 1977, p. 52). This implicitly means that learners of English should have vocabulary knowledge and put it into "productive use" (Nation, 2001, p. 129; Fairouz, 2011) to be able to express themselves in various contexts with no difficulty or hesitation.

6.2.3. Grammar Knowledge

Knowledge of grammar refers to knowing the rules of language (cf. usage) and how to be used in contexts appropriately (cf. use). Concerning language rules, they manage the relationship between nouns, verbs, adverbs, adjectives, determiners, prepositions, etc. in sentences indicated above. That is, syntactically speaking, nouns are used before and after verbs working as subjects and objects, respectively (e.g., *Teachers help students*); verbs follow nouns except with imperative sentences where verbs occur at the

beginning of sentences (e.g., *Help me, please*); adjectives occur before nouns (e.g., *A good man*) and after intensive verbs of *is, are, become, etc.*, (e.g., *He becomes sad*); adverbs occur in the beginning of a sentence (e.g., *Sometimes, I help my friend*), in the middle of a sentence (e.g., *I sometimes help my friend*) and at the end of the sentence (e.g., *I help my friend every day*); and finally, prepositions have no fixed morphological features; rather, they occur before nouns (e.g., *in hospitals*) and with verbs to form idiomatic expressions (e.g., *look for*).

Concerning the use of rules, each rule has its own specific action time (i.e., past, present, future, etc.) to be used depending on the context. Therefore, learners of English are required to learn the grammar knowledge, both use and usage, to be able to speak English correctly. In other words, learning the accurate use of grammar is one thing and using it in speech correctly is another. On this base, some learners show good grammar knowledge in reading and writing but they may make grammatical errors when they speak. Such errors affect the accuracy of the speaking skill.

6.3. Fluency

According to Shahini and Shahamirian (2017), fluency is a significant indication of the speaker's proficiency in a foreign or second language. Similarly, Koponen and Rigenbach (2000, p. 6) defined fluency as the "high proficiency" of language obtained as a result of grasping vocabulary and grammar. This proficiency is manifested in speech flow, continuity, automaticity, or smoothness. In this connection, Fillmore (1979) argued that fluency refers to the ability to speak at length with few pauses coherently, semantically and appropriately in wider contexts. Bailey (2003) and Byrne (1986) admitted that fluency refers to the ability to use language quickly and confidently without much hesitations or unnatural pauses that may cause barriers in communication. In the same vein,

Ellis (2009) believed that fluency is the ability to use language with speed and ease in communicating ideas in the real time to convey meanings. Richards (2009) provided a brave definition for fluency saying that it refers to the natural use of language produced by the speaker in a meaningful interaction showing comprehensible and going communication despite his/her communicative competence limitations.

From a different perspective, Skehan (2009) considered fluency as a standard for measuring the degree of (dys)fluency through counting the number of pauses, repetitions, false starts, replacements, and syllables per minute in speech. Implicatively, this indicates that (dys)fluency cannot be avoided due to, for example, informative load, information processing, regulators of communicative relations between the speaker and listener. Therefore, in this study, fluency refers to speaking without excessive repetitions, pausing or hesitations.

7. Gender in Speaking Skill

As you know, men and women differ much biologically and physically allowing different construction socially and culturally. Such social and cultural differences render a necessarily different communication style. Reviewing earlier empirical studies, Macoby and Jacklin (1974) argued that education is a commonplace for females to excel in verbal communication than males notably at higher education stages due to their great natural verbal aptitude and socialization to socio-emotion tasks than that of males. In this connection, Tylor (1978) argued that women tend to use too personal language; for that, they are criticized for blunting discourse argumentation. The findings of this study showed certain differences between males and females in that the latter use more precise color words and politeness markers than the former. Similarly, Lakoff (1973) believed that females often prefer to use more concrete color words, such as *mauve*, *yellow*, *azure*, *beige*, *lavender*, etc. that have a close

relationship with life, and milder expletives in a milder tone. However, males often speak in a strong tone preferring empty adjectives such as *charming*, *divine*, *cute*, etc. to express feelings. These differences, according to Flynn (1988), are attributed to the fact that females see the world as a series of connections or a web of interpersonal relationships such as family ties, memberships, responsibilities towards others, etc. but as impersonally denoted categories as seen by males. This can be seen in females' communication style showing indirectness, digressive, and first-person voice and second person users. That is, females sound more affinitive and polite rather than objective.

Theories of gender-typical epistemologies suggest that females and males adopt different topical foci. That is, females focus on interpersonal relationship and effect while men focus on denotative details. In the Deficit Theory, developed by Lakoff (1975), female language sounds inferior to male language while in Dominance Theory, developed by Thorne and Henley (1975), female language sounds superior while male language sounds inferior. In a contrastive vein, Cameron (1992) believed that females are better at listening as they share emotions with others than males.

Lakoff (1973) provided a number of features which are stereotypically associated with women's speech, showing politeness, e.g., using quantifiers (e.g., *nearly*, *kind of*), hedges (e.g., *may be*, *I guess*), intensifiers (e.g., *really*, *very*), tag questions (e.g., *isn't it?*), etc. In a similar vein, Rubin and Nelson (1983) found that such expressions are gender-typical of any speaker who is on the end bottom of asymmetric power relations. On this base, the speaker of such powerless expressions is a women. However, Cameron (1992) argued that both males and females use tag questions even they are sure about what they want to say. Despite these differences, females are seen using a formal manner in speech which is manifested in

using hypercorrect grammar and pronunciation. As regards intonation, they, unlike males, use a rising intonation in declarative sentences showing their uncertainty, obedience, passiveness, and indecision in what they say. Concerning humor, females are observed as less humorous than males. People stereotypically associate these styles with females. In regard to the communication style, Tymson (1998) compared between male and female styles in communication showing that males focus on information and goal of communication, report the style of speaking, talk about one thing, use a succinct language, and need to know the answer. However, females focus on information and processes, report the style of speaking, talk about more things, develop a storytelling style of speech, and want to ask right questions.

To conclude, addressing differences between male and female language in lexicon, syntax and pragmatics shows that each sex has a unique language style. So, if males speak in the way of females or females speak in the way of males, such speakers are considered as bi-sexual. Saying other than this is attributed to the listener's socio-cultural experience which changes gender-typical expressions into gender-typed ones.

8. Methodology

8.1. Sample and Procedures

The study targeted the third year students of English, Faculty of Education, Ibb University, Yemen, in the second semester of the academic year 2020-2021. The purpose behind selecting those students in particular was based on our assumption that they achieved a good level in the spoken English due to the full required knowledge and practice in the speaking skill introduced to them in all four courses of speaking skill of the B.A. programme. Put another way, such students had, *assumingly*, advanced speaking abilities that could enable them to express themselves in English orally. The society of the study was

(72) students, 50 females and 22 males. A sample of 36 students, 11 males and 25 females, taking 50% each, was selected randomly through selecting even numbers of their attendance sheet.

To collect the required data, an oral test was designed by the researcher where the sample was required to talk about only ONE topic of the three given familiar ones: *Yemen, Relationship, and Future Ambitions* (see Appendix I) using at least 400 words. After announcing the date of the oral test to them, the researcher recorded their discourses, using his mobile phone, for 150 minutes. To ensure natural and unbiased discourses, the researcher did not tell them about recordings and reasons behind that. To analyze the data, the researcher transcribed all participants' discourses manually for analysis.

8.2. Assessment of Speaking Skill

A due consideration was paid by the researcher to both accuracy (i.e., pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar) and fluency of the participants' oral performance, considering them as four skills. Drawing on Xu (2018) rubric, the researcher assessed the participants' oral performance, changing some items of the rubric to be in line with the main objective of the study and the participants' performance. That is, the overall score given was 20; that is, each skill received 5 scores based on scales listed for rating skills (see Table 5, Appendix II). To assess the level of the speaking skill, the GPA system of Ibb University was followed. Table 1 below shows the scoring criteria followed:

Table (1): Scoring Criteria

Degrees	Score	Percentage	Level
0	0 - 9	0% - 49.9%	Weak
1	10 - 12	50% - 64.9%	Pass
2	13 - 15	65% - 79.9%	Good
3	16 - 17	80% - 89.9%	Very Good
4	18 - 20	90% - 100%	Excellent

8.3. Assessment of Inter-Rater's Reliability

The inter-rater's reliability is a technique used to calculate the degree of agreement among raters to ensure scoring consensus. For this end, two raters were recruited in this study. Then, a Pearson Correlation (PC) was employed to calculate the degree of agreement between the two raters which accordingly showed a high degree of reliability between them, $PC = .901$, confidence interval = 90%, $p < 0.05$.

9. Results

9.1. Overall Level of Speaking Ability

Q.1. What is the overall level of speaking skill with the third year students of English?

To address this question, descriptive statistics was employed to calculate means and standard deviations obtained from the oral test. The students' speaking skill was rated based on Xu (2018) rubric of assessment of speaking skill (i.e., pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and fluency). Table 2 summarizes the results:

Table (2): Descriptive Statistics for Overall Level of Speaking Skill

Skills	N	M	SD
Pronunciation	36	2.50	0.87
Vocabulary	36	2.72	0.74
Grammar	36	2.66	0.75
Fluency	36	2.94	0.82
Total	36	11.05	2.41

Table 2 clearly depicts that the overall mean scores of both male and female students ($M = 11.05/20$, $SD = 2.41$) showed that the overall level of speaking skill with male and female students was a *pass* (55.25%).

9.2. Male Speaking Skill

Q.2. What is the level of male students' speaking skill?

To address this question, descriptive statistics was employed to calculate means

and standard deviations of male students' speaking skill. Table 3 summarizes the results:

Table (3): Descriptive Statistics for Male Students' Speaking Skill

Skills	N	M	SD
Pronunciation	11	3.00	0.63
Vocabulary	11	3.45	0.52
Grammar	11	3.00	0.77
Fluency	11	3.00	1.00
Total	11	12.90	2.58

Table 3 clearly depicts that the overall mean scores of male students ($M = 12.90/20$, $SD = 2.58$) showed that the level of the speaking skill with male students was a *pass* (64.05%). That is, the vocabulary skill posits the **top** rank ($M = 3.45/5$, $SD = 0.52$) between the other skills indicating that the level of male students in this skill was *good* (69%) while the other three skills of pronunciation ($M = 3.00/5$, $SD = 0.63$), grammar ($M = 3.00/5$, $SD = 0.77$), and fluency ($M = 3.00/5$, $SD = 1.00$) *all* posit an equal rank of the **second** rank indicating that their level in these skills was a *pass* (60%).

9.3. Female Speaking Skill

Q.3. What is the level of female students' speaking skill?

To address this question, descriptive statistics was employed to calculate means and standard deviations of the female students' skills. Table 4 summarizes the results:

Table (4): Descriptive Statistics for Female Students' Speaking Skill

Skills	N	M	SD
Pronunciation	25	2.28	0.89
Vocabulary	25	2.40	0.57
Grammar	25	2.52	0.71
Fluency	25	2.92	0.75
Total	25	10.24	1.85

Table 4 clearly depicts that the overall mean scores of female students ($M = 10.24/20$, $SD = 1.85$) showed that the level of speaking skill with female students was a

pass (51.02%). That is, the fluency skill posits the **top** rank ($M = 2.92/5$, $SD = 0.75$) between the other skills showing that their level in this skill was a *pass* (58.04%); the grammar skill posits the **second** rank ($M = 2.52/5$, $SD = 0.71$) showing that their level in this skill was a *pass* (50.04%); the vocabulary skill posits the **third** rank ($M = 2.40/5$, $SD = 0.57$) showing that their level in this skill was *weak* (48%); and the pronunciation skill posits the final rank ($M = 2.28/5$, $SD = 0.89$) showing that their level in this skill was *weak* (45.06%).

9.4. Gender Differences in Speaking Skill

Q.4. Are there any statistically significant differences at the level of $p \leq 0.05$ between the mean score of male and female students' speaking skill attributed to the variable of gender?

A Test for Two Independent Samples was employed to identify whether there were statistically significant differences between male and female students' speaking skill attributed to the variable of gender. Table 5 summarizes the results:

Table (5): Inferential Statistics for Differences in Male and Female's Speaking Skill

Speaking Skills	Gender	N	M	t	df	sig.
Pronunciation	Male	11	3.00	2.41	34	0.02
	Female	25	2.28			
Vocab	Male	11	3.45	5.18	34	0.00
	Female	25	2.40			
Grammar	Male	11	3.00	1.81	34	0.07
	Female	25	2.52			
Fluency	Male	11	3.00	0.26	34	0.79
	Female	25	2.92			
Total	Male	11	12.90	3.518	34	0.00
	Female	25	10.24			

Table 5 shows that there were statistically significant differences between the mean score of males and females' speaking skill ($M = 12.90 > 10.24$, $SD = 2.58 > 1.85$, $t = 3.51$, $P > 0.05$) in favor of males. This indicates that the level of male students in the speaking skill was better than females and similarly was at the level of each skill, apart.

10. Discussion of Results

10.1. Overall Level of Speaking Skill

Based on the results shown in Table 2, both male and female students showed an overall weakness in the speaking skill which

was manifested in showing problems in pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and fluency. That is, all students could not provide well-spoken discourses that could clearly convey meanings to listeners (Goh, 2007; Hedge, 2000). This in turn might lead to a lack of comprehending the message by the listener, producing unsuccessful communication. This problem might be attributed to the lack of practice in English inside and outside the classroom. Such findings are discussed below in relation to the theoretical tenets introduced in literature.

10.2. Male Speaking Skill

Based on the results shown in Table 3, male students showed that they encountered difficulties when speaking English. These

difficulties might be attributed to problems of language accuracy (i.e., pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar) and fluency which was manifested in the lack of oral proficiency. Results of each skill are discussed below.

10.2.1. Pronunciation

Pronunciation was one of the least skills achieved by male students which indicates that they had problems in pronunciation. Such a case showed that they could not use pitch, stress and unstress, intonations, etc. nor did they pronounce some words correctly. This problem might be attributed to the lack of awareness in such spoken features in the early beginning of learning process. However, Luoma (2004) observed that the lack of practicing English is a great problem behind learners' bad pronunciation. Hedge (2000) observed that lacking the correct pronunciation might detain listeners from understanding the message as intended by the speaker.

10.2.2. Vocabulary

Similarly, vocabulary was one of the least skills achieved by male students which indicates that there was a lack of accuracy in vocabulary. This problem was manifested in the lack of using most of words appropriately while speaking. This problem might be attributed to the lack of vocabulary knowledge and practice (Nation, 2001; Fairouz, 2011). Hedge (2000) found that the effect of L1 plays a great role in making speakers provide the literal meaning of words. While, Harmer (2001) admitted that these problems are natural in an oral discourse because it is spontaneous allowing no time for speakers to think.

10.2.3 Grammar

Grammar was also one of the least skills achieved by male students which indicates that there was a lack of accuracy in grammar while speaking. This problem was manifested in providing ungrammatical sentences represented in using adjectives in the place of adverbs, verbs in the place of nouns,

and misusing verb tense. Providing erroneous sentences while speaking might be attributed to the lack of knowledge in grammar rules (Nunan, 2003). However, Albino (2017) believed that the extent of showing grammar problems in learners' oral discourse is determined by the extent of their oral practice.

10.2.4 Fluency

Based on the males' scores in fluency, there was a lack of fluency in their oral discourse which was manifested in some repetitions, unnatural pauses, false starts, minimal hesitations, etc. This problem might be attributed to the lack of vocabulary and grammar knowledge creating a lack of self-confidence (Byrne, 1986) and dysfluency with speakers (Koponen & Riggensbach, 2000).

10.3. Female Speaking Skill

Based on the overall mean scores of the female students' speaking skill shown in Table 4, they also encountered difficulties when speaking English due to the lack of accuracy and fluency showing a lack of oral proficiency. Results of each skill are discussed below.

10.3.1. Pronunciation

Pronunciation was the least skill scored in females' oral discourse which showed that they had problems in pronunciation. That is, they mispronounced most of words showing frequent unintelligible articulations and violating the rules of intonations (raising, falling), stress and unstress, '-ed' of pastness, '-s' ending nouns and verbs, etc. These problems might be attributed to the lack of knowledge and practice inside and outside the classroom. In this connection, Hedge (2000) observed that the lack of good pronunciation might detain listeners from receiving the message well. In the same vein, Luoma (2004) observed that the lack of practicing English is a great problem behind learners' bad pronunciation.

10.3.2. Vocabulary

The female's discourse showed that inappropriate words were frequently used. This problem was manifested in lacking words related to the topic discussed which rendered them stop talking. In effect, this problem made the females use certain strategies (e.g., nodding heads, mumming, laughing, etc.) to compensate the vocabulary loss noticed. These problems might be attributed to the lack of vocabulary knowledge due to the lack of enough reading which works as a means of incidental vocabulary development (Fairouz, 2011). In this connection, Hedge (2000) found that using inappropriate words by speakers might be attributed to the effect of L1 which allows them to translate words needed literally. By contrast, Harmer (2001) admitted that spontaneity plays a great role in using words inappropriately because there is no time for speakers to think more while talking.

10.3.3. Grammar

The female students' discourse showed frequent erroneous sentences manifested in using inappropriate verb tenses, conjunctions (e.g., and, also, etc.), prepositions (e.g., *from* instead of *of*, etc.), adjectives in place of adverbs, verbs in place of nouns, especially in the beginning of sentences (i.e., gerund), following nouns by adjectives, following prepositions with verbs instead of nouns (e.g., by listen, when go, etc.), etc. These problems might be attributed to the lack of knowledge in grammar rules, such as use tenses, conjunctions, prepositions, etc. (Nunan, 2003). In this regard, Albino (2017) observed that students' grammar problems are attributed to the teacher's absent role in providing opportunities to students to enable them to use English orally or in writing supported by meaningful feedback on grammar problems.

10.3.4. Fluency

Based on the females' score in fluency, their oral discourse showed a slow rate of

speaking associated with frequent repetitions, and minimal hesitations causing a coherence loss. These problems might be attributed to the lack of accuracy in vocabulary and grammar knowledge which made them hesitate more and more while speaking. Koponen and Riggenbach (2000) found that the lack of practicing speaking creates a lack of confidence with speakers resulting in making multiple hesitations, false starts, repetitions, etc.

10.4. Gender Differences in Speaking Skill

Based on the results shown in Table 5, there were statistically significant differences between the mean scores of male and female students' speaking skill, in favor of male students, attributed to the variable of gender. This indicates that "gender" had an effect on the students' speaking skill. That is, the nature of masculinity in the Arab/Yemeni culture promotes courage and extroversion with males more than females; the case that allows more space to male students to practice English inside and outside the classroom than females do. Besides the critical nature of femininity, the Yemeni society does not encourage women to talk, especially in front of men, in Arabic let alone in English considering it as a shame. Hence, female students show lower performance than male ones in oral communications.

11. Findings and Pedagogical Implications

The analyses of both male and female students' oral discourses revealed, first, difficulties encountered by both males and females due to the lack of accuracy and fluency of English. This in turn allowed *generally* an unsatisfactory level in the oral proficiency of both sexes. Second, gender had an effect on students' oral skill, in favor of males, in the Yemeni context which means the (Yemeni) culture enhances male dominance. Third, the loss of vocabulary rendered males use inappropriate words to compensate a word loss

while females were noticed using strategies (e.g., nodding heads, mumming, laughing, etc.) instead. Fourth, misusing verb tenses, using adjectives in place of adverbs, and using verbs in place of nouns were common problems of both sexes. Finally, fluency was greatly affected by accuracy (of grammar and vocabulary) rather than pronunciation; that is, the latter skill had no direct effect on fluency as speakers mostly think that their pronunciation is correct.

Such findings may assist curriculum developers and instructors to account for such problems in course materials and teaching methods, respectively. That is, curriculum developers should design speaking courses that develop students' speaking skills rather than providing them with information about speaking. Then, a good methodology of teaching together with training students to speak on various topics should be established, making the oral practice at the heart of these courses. Moreover, language labs should be involved for assessing students' performance in speaking skills in general through using some technological tools such as inputlog 7.0 (Van Waes et al., 2012) and Active Presenter, a screen recorded program, in order to explore the extent of students' pauses due to a word loss and help them exceed this problem, in particular, to develop fluency.

For instructors, they should bear in mind that the lack of accuracy (i.e., pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary) and fluency is the main problem that detains students from speaking English proficiently. That is, the degree of showing problems in students' fluency relies heavily on the degree of showing problems in language accuracy. Therefore, instructors should focus on students' accuracy in all three skills of pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary for developing their speaking skill. Concerning pronunciation, teachers need to draw students' attention to the differences between vowel and consonant sounds and their articulation. This may be achieved when teachers provide various examples in relation, together with rules of

pronouncing the ending morphemes of present and past verbs '-s' and '-d', respectively. This may be attained by providing students with multiple examples in the classroom, allowing them to utter them correctly, and providing a feedback to correct mispronunciations, if any. As regards grammar, instructors should provide tasks and activities that allow students to develop the knowledge of grammar rules and the way to be used in real contexts, providing them with opportunities to practice them inside the classroom. Most importantly, instructors need to focus on teaching adjectives, nouns, and adverbs in all types of sentence structure (i.e., simple, compound, and complex) to enable students to use them correctly while speaking. This technique should be supported by providing a feedback on errors committed immediately and tactfully. Concerning vocabulary, instructors should provide students with tasks and activities on vocabulary knowledge through exposing them to passages of various registers extensively and intensively to develop their word power. For that, instructors may use strategies of inferring, guessing, matching synonyms/antonyms, filling in blanks, etc. in the classroom. These activities should be supported by providing students with opportunities to speak on various topics in the classroom supported by a feedback on the errors noticed. The lack of vocabulary can be overcome in the very beginning through providing students with strategies (e.g., nodding head, gestures, facial expressions, etc.) that/to help them speak and develop fluency. As regards fluency, teachers should provide students with consciousness-raising tasks, rehearsal or repetition tasks, discourse markers (e.g., lexical fillers) and communicative free-production activities (e.g., general speaking tasks without a specific focus), etc. Finally, instructors should not forget the effect of the Yemeni masculinity-based culture on students' oral performance by paying more attention to females through encouraging them to speak inside the classroom.

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Appendix

Table (5): Rubric for Assessing Speaking Skill

Skills	Scores				
	5	4	3	2	1
Pronunciation	Correct pronunciation and clear articulation are noticed.	Correct pronunciation and clear articulation are <i>mostly</i> noticed.	Correct pronunciation & clear articulation are largely noticed except occasional errors.	Phonological errors and unintelligible articulations are frequently noticed	Insufficient accuracy in pronunciation.
Vocabulary	All words are appropriately used.	Appropriate words are <i>mostly</i> used.	Appropriate words are largely used except occasional errors.	Inappropriate words are frequently used.	Insufficient accuracy in vocabulary use.
Grammar	All sentence structures are correctly used.	Correct sentence structures are <i>mostly</i> used.	Correct sentence structures are largely used except occasional errors.	Incorrect sentence structures are frequently used	Insufficient accuracy in grammar.
Fluency	Speaking almost with no repetition and/or minimal hesitation.	Speaking without noticeable effort showing occasional repetitions and minimal hesitations.	Speaking with some noticeable effort showing less repetitions and minimal hesitations.	Speaking with noticeable effort showing frequent repetitions, and minimal hesitations and losing coherence.	Speaking slowly showing frequent repetitions and minimal hesitations, and losing coherence.

Table (6): Rubric for Assessment of *Male* Speaking Ability

Skills	Pronunciation	Vocabulary	Grammar	Fluency	Total
Scores	5	5	5	5	20
Ps					
1	3	4	3	4	14
2	2	3	3	3	11
3	3	4	4	4	15
4	4	4	4	3	15
5	3	3	2	4	12
6	3	3	3	4	13
7	3	4	3	3	18
8	4	4	3	3	14
9	3	3	2	2	10
10	2	3	4	1	10
11	3	3	2	2	10
Scores	33	38	33	33	142
M	3.00	3.45	3.00	3.00	12.90
SD	0.63	0.52	0.77	1.00	2.58

Table (7): Rubrics for Assessment of *Female* Speaking Ability

Skills	Pronunciation	Vocabulary	Grammar	Fluency	Total
Scores	5	5	5	5	20
Ps					
1	3	3	4	3	13
2	2	2	2	3	9
3	2	2	2	2	8
4	3	3	3	4	13
5	2	3	3	3	11
6	1	2	2	2	7
7	3	3	3	3	12
8	2	3	4	4	13
9	3	2	3	4	12
10	1	2	2	3	8
11	2	3	2	3	10

Skills Scores Ps	Pronunciation 5	Vocabulary 5	Grammar 5	Fluency 5	Total 20
12	2	2	3	3	10
13	3	2	2	2	9
14	4	3	3	3	13
15	1	3	3	4	11
16	2	1	3	4	10
17	2	3	2	4	11
18	2	2	3	3	10
19	3	2	2	2	11
20	4	2	2	2	10
21	3	3	2	2	10
22	2	3	2	3	10
23	1	2	1	2	6
24	2	2	3	2	9
25	3	2	2	3	10
Scores	58	60	63	73	256
M	2.28	2.40	2.52	2.92	10.24
SD	0.89	0.57	0.71	0.75	1.85