

TEACHING SPEAKING SKILL TO EFL COLLEGE STUDENTS THROUGH TASK-BASED APPROACH: PROBLEMS AND IMPROVEMENT

Nasser Omer M. Al-Tamimi

Department of English- College of Education

Seiyun University, Yemen

tnotamimi@yahoo.com

Nabil Khadher Muhsen Abudllah

Department of English-College of Education, Zingibar

Abyan University, Yemen

nalsomaiti@gmail.com

Wagdi Rashad Ali Bin-Hady

Department of English - College of Education, Socotra

Hadhramout University, Yemen

wagdyrashad@gmail.com

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4116-113X>

ABSTARCT: *This study aimed at exploring Yemeni EFL students' perceived problems of speaking and enhancing their speaking performance using task-based instruction strategy. It followed a quasi-experimental research design to check the degree of enhancement in the students' speaking skills, and a qualitative design to check students' problems in speaking. To ensure effective use of strategic teaching, the researchers considered students' needs and motivation by involving them in an interview about the problems they face when communicating in English. Non-probabilistic convenience sampling was used in the present study. The sample consisted of 20 first-year college students at Socotra Faculty of Education, Hadhramout University, Yemen, in the academic year of 2018-2019. The findings revealed that students face many speaking problems pertaining to knowledge of phonology, vocabulary, grammar and problems of sustaining the oral interaction, as well as psychology -related problems. The analysis of data collected, using paired sample t-test, indicates a significant improvement has taken place in students' speaking skill compared to the pre-test and the post-test performance with t-value of 5.349 and p. value = .000, < .0005, with effect size of (ES = .53). Based on the findings, the study recommends that EFL teachers focus on the problems reported by students whenever they want to develop their students' communicative competence.*

KEYWORDS: communicative competence, EFL learners, learners' expectations, speaking problems, task-based instruction, teaching speaking

INTRODUCTION

"I hate make a fool of myself" is a sentence that, at Yemeni universities, students usually utter whenever they are asked "why don't you like to have a role in a conversation?" This perception is likely to prevent the students from mastering the ability to speak the foreign language properly,

which, according to Nunan (1991), is the target of every language learner. Thus, before starting the teaching of English, teachers should change the belief and corresponding attitude reflected in the students' utterance.

The major aim of teaching English at the Yemeni universities is to develop learners' communicative competence in which students can express themselves orally and fluently in class and outside of classrooms (Bin-Hady, 2016; Al-Tamimi, 2014). Although the speaking skill is not taught in a proper way at the elementary and secondary stages of formalised Yemeni education, pursuing higher studies is often dependent on having speaking ability in English. Therefore, speaking is the most important skill for foreign language learners if they want to pursue their higher education.

However, speaking is deemed to be difficult for foreign language learners. Most of the students at university level cannot pronounce words correctly and they are unable to express themselves orally in English (Al-Tamimi & Attamimi, 2018). They graduate with weak competence in English language communication (Gubaily, 2012; Zuheer, 2008; Abdullah, and Patil (2012). The reasons behind this difficulty might be attributed to a number of factors including negative linguistic transfer of Arabic, lack of appropriate methods, and lack of motivation (Alduais & Al-Shamiry, 2013; Bin-Tahir & Hanapi, 2017 and Al-Tamimi & Attamimi, 2018).

Current practices in the instruction of speaking in Yemeni schools and universities leave much to be desired. For most of EFL teachers, speaking and listening are mostly neglected and the emphasis is on grammar and vocabulary (Cheekeong, et al., 2014; Hwaider, 2017; Bin-Tahir & Hanapi, 2017). Most of the teachers concentrate on asking students to master the grammatical points of the language. This overemphasis on teaching grammar produces students who can write correct sentences but fail to express themselves orally. Therefore, types of tasks that are set for English speaking classes frequently reflect artificial objectives that demand more attention to the grammatical aspects which are rarely needed in daily life.

Given this situation, the most important components of speaking, such as accuracy, fluency, appropriateness, coherence and the like, are not focused upon and the speaking skill is taught primarily by using the grammar translation method. Such a method has a negative impact on the speaking ability of many students learning English. As a result of emphasising the grammatical aspects in the teaching of speaking, EFL teachers in most Yemeni schools fail to develop students' progress in speaking skills. This may partially indicate why most Yemeni students are weak in expressing themselves orally in English, even though they have been in contact with the target language for six years.

In response to a call raised by Bataineh et al. (2011), Ahmed (2018) and Adiantika and Purnomo (2018) regarding the use of communicative language techniques such as cooperative learning, role-play, task-based language teaching (TBLT) and so on in teaching speaking skills, this study was conducted by using an experiment that focused on enhancing students' speaking skill through introducing TBLT in Yemeni EFL classrooms. Therefore, the purposes of the study are to identify the problems students face when they speak English and to find out the effect of task-based instruction on improving students' speaking skill since, to the researchers' best knowledge, there does not exist any similar study conducted in the Yemeni context.

Research Questions

- 1- What are some of the problems students face when they talk?
- 2- To what extent does the task-based instruction enhance students' competence in speaking?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Problems of Speaking

A number of studies have examined EFL students' concerns and problems that they face while participating in speaking classroom activities. Notable studies were conducted by Zhang and Liu (2008); Gan (2012); Al Hosni (2014); Wang (2014); and Tuan and Mai (2015). They were mostly focused on university students learning English in their environments in which a majority of people speak another language other than English. These studies, in relation to academic performance, highlighted students' speaking problems. For example, Zhang and Liu (2008) explored the Chinese EFL learners' foreign language anxiety, personality traits and self-esteem. Participants were 934 non-English majors attending first year of undergraduate level and data were collected using a 94 item survey. Findings revealed that students felt anxious in English class and they were afraid of being negatively evaluated. The results also indicated that students were apprehensive about speaking English either in class or in the process of taking tests.

Gan (2012) investigated the oral English skills problems encountered in ESL students at tertiary level. Twenty students participated in the study and data were collected through using semi-structured interviews by giving students a chance to express their thoughts about their experiences in speaking problems they encounter when they try to speak English. The findings indicate that students faced many problems in their oral speaking, such as inadequate vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation and intonation. Additionally, students have no practice of speaking inside the classroom and they have a poor environment outside the classroom .

Al Hosni (2014) investigated the speaking problems faced by young EFL learners. Grade 5 teachers and students in basic education school in Oman were involved in the study and classroom observation, semi-structured interview as well as curricular analysis were used to collect data. The findings revealed that students encountered linguistic problems in which students find it difficult to use appropriate words when they speak. Also the use of the mother language is an additional problem students face. They cannot build up sentences in English, so they revert back to their mother tongues to attempt to compensate for their inabilities. The last problem is inhibition which means that students feel afraid of talking in English in front of their peers; they feel afraid of making mistakes. With regard to the factors leading to these difficulties in speaking, the results indicated that teachers do not spend enough time in the classroom to teach speaking and give too much time in teaching grammar and vocabulary.

Wang (2014) discussed the difficulty of Chinese EFL students in speaking English fluently and accurately. 100 students participated in the study. They were junior English majors studying at the university level. A questionnaire of ten items was constructed with close-ended questions. The findings indicated two major problems of speaking: accuracy, which include grammar mistakes, and fluency, which contains mispronouncing words, hesitating and forgetting vocabulary while speaking.

Tuan and Mai (2015) conducted a study to find out students' problems in speaking English. Two hundred and three students and ten teachers were involved in the study. Data were collected by using a questionnaire and classroom observation. The results of both the students' and teachers' questionnaires as well as the observation were quite similar. These findings indicated that topical knowledge, listening ability, confidence, speaking activities are factors that have affected students' speaking performance. Also grammar, pronunciation, fluency and vocabulary are among other problems which impede students' ability to speak English.

Most of the studies reviewed above examined EFL and ESL students who were studying English in Chinese, Hong Kong, and Oman. Most of the speaking problems identified by these studies are related to two categories of problems i.e., the linguistic and non-linguistics problems. The linguistics problems are related to vocabulary, syntax, coherence and cohesion, and phonology. The non-linguistic problems are concerned with the comparatively less time given to students in the classroom to practice speaking and the ways teachers adopted in teaching speaking inside the classroom. These problems lead to a number of additional issues which are closely related to anxiety, personality traits, self-esteem, poor environment for communication outside the classroom and inhibition in which students feel afraid of making mistakes. The results of the previous studies concerned the problems faced by EFL learners make it necessary for language learning experts to train students on how to overcome their difficulties in speaking the language. Little research has been done in Yemen that has comprehensively surveyed the problems of speaking and there are few studies that have investigated the effect of TBLT on developing speaking skill.

Given the lack of research into English speaking problems among students at the tertiary level, the current study first identifies the speaking problems faced by Yemeni students and then assesses the effectiveness of the TBLT method to improve students' speaking skills.

Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT)

TBLT is one of the communicative approach methods which involves students in meaningful tasks using the target language. It is a process that focuses on using authentic language tasks (Lin, 2009). In the light of communicative approach, task-based teaching in the current study is defined as a plan of teaching which focuses on communicative tasks and having methods and language evaluation aiming at improving speaking skills. The priority of TBLT is given to fluency over accuracy, but accuracy is not totally neglected. Students should achieve grammatical competence through engaging in the learning process by communicating in the target language with their peers. The learning process through task-based teaching, according to Willis (1996), is guided in three stages, namely pre-task, task cycle/during task and post-task. As we build on Willis' approach, we summarize the three stages in the next sections and then discuss previous studies using the approach.

Pre-Task

The aim of this stage is to prepare learners to acquire the language by performing tasks mirroring the real world activities. The role of the teacher in this stage is to define the topic and to explain the objectives and the outcomes required from learners to perform the task. To confirm that all students understand the task, teachers should allow students to observe a model of how to do a task. The aim of this stage is to increase the motivation and inspiration of learners towards the

topic (Aliakbari & Jamalvandi, 2010). The time duration of performing this stage may last for two to twenty minutes, depending on the familiarity of the students with the task and the specification of each type of tasks.

During- Task

In this stage, the learning process should be performed in the real situations which require communication. The students are expected to have the chance to talk with each other in the target language. Teachers in this case should engage students in several activities during the process to enhance students' speaking competence. The teacher's role is to monitor the performance of the task and work as a facilitator or counsellor of the learning process. Three stages can be used while speaking, which are a) task, b) planning and 3) report.

• Task

In this stage, the teacher encourages learners to use the target language to perform the task, either in pair work or small groups.

• Planning

In this stage, learners should prepare and plan their reports by telling the whole class how they performed the task.

• Report

In this stage, learners tell the whole class about their findings, either in spoken or written form.

Post-Task

This task is to enable learners to practice the language activities. Learners are encouraged to increase their confidence in speaking the target language in order to improve their fluency. The role of the teacher in this case is to allow learners to practice the language and analyse their previous activities, either in spoken or written forms.

Given its centrality, the TBLT approach has been widely built upon in the literature. Aliakbari and Jamalvandi (2010) investigated the impact of role play techniques on developing EFL learners' speaking skill. This study focused on role-play as a praised technique in task-based language teaching. The study adopted an experimental design with two groups, experimental and control. 60 EFL sophomores studying in different universities in the city of Ilam were randomly chosen to participate in the study. Data were collected using IELTS speaking as a pre-test and a post-test. The study lasted for two months. Role-play cards based on TBLT were given to the students in the experimental group while the control group followed the regular way of teaching based on traditional methods used by teachers in these universities. The findings of the study showed a positive effect of role play based on TBLT on developing students' speaking skill.

Tabrizi and Nasiri (2011) investigated the effectiveness of task-based techniques in improving speaking proficiency and gender differences on speaking proficiency development. Sixty students were distributed among two groups. Seventeen females and 13 males were assigned to the experimental group while 16 males and 14 females were assigned to the control group. They were learning at the elementary level at the time when they participated in this study. The two groups were divided according to their results obtained from the interview, which were used as a pre-test. After the treatment, students were interviewed as a post-test. Data were analysed by using an independent t-test and the results showed that the experimental group outperformed the

control group in the post-test, indicating the positive effect of task-based instruction in developing speaking skills. The gender difference between males and females showed insignificant results.

Lou et al. (2016) investigated the effects of task-based language teaching (TBLT) on students' oral performance among non-English- majors. Sixty five first-year students from Yangtze University participated in the study. Experimental design was adopted in the study with two groups, experimental and control. Experimental group received the treatment of task-based instruction while the control group was taught through using the PPP approach. The students' level of oral performance were tested before carrying out the study. The results showed insignificant differences between the experimental and control groups. At the end of the semester, students were also tested and the findings showed that the effect of task-based instruction on developing students' oral performance with regard to accuracy, fluency was positive in comparison with low results obtained by the control group through the 3Ps methodology.

Yousif (2017) conducted a study in finding out the effect of the communicative task-based instruction on improving students' oral communication skills among the Sudanese university EFL students. An experimental design was adopted to carry out the treatment. 63 participants were involved in the study among them were 33 teachers and 30 students who were college students at the first year. Data were collected using qualitative and quantitative approaches. The research instruments were pre-test and post-test, observation and a questionnaire. The data were analysed using frequency distribution, chi-square test, t-test, p- value, percentages, and median. The findings of this study revealed positive effectiveness of task-based instruction on enhancing students' speaking.

The aforementioned studies have dealt with the effectiveness of task-based instruction on improving speaking skill. These studies constitute an area of close concern for the present study as the results or insight they yield might help interpret the results of this study within the same learning context. On the basis of what has been reviewed, it also can be concluded that using the task-based approach could be effective in developing the speaking skill as a viable method in speaking instruction. This type of instruction, which has been in existence for almost three decades, is based on the communicative approach which advocates that learning cannot happen without the learners' wish, interest and motivation. All previous studies within this domain placed a great deal of assurance on the primary importance of possessing a fluent level of speaking skill in learning English as a foreign language and the necessity to create new techniques for developing speaking performance.

Although some research has been carried out on speaking, there have been few empirical investigations conducted on the effect of TBLT on improving speaking among Yemeni university and secondary school students. Therefore, the current spotlight on the field of study surrounding the speaking skill has been focused, and has additionally been used to investigate the use of TBLT as a new method for better speaking performance. The learner's active participation in the learning process, and the teacher's new role of being a facilitator, encourager, advisor, and organizer rather than a dominant figure in the classroom, are all principles that constitute an essential condition for developing successful learning.

METHODOLOGY

Design of the Study

The study utilised the research methods belonging to both the quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quasi-experimental design was adopted with one group pre-test post-test design. The quasi-experimental design is "a practical compromise between true experimentation and the nature of human language behavior which a researcher wishes to investigate" (Al-Alami, 2015, p. 1333). Non-probabilistic convenience sampling was used in the present study. According to Creswell (2012, p. 45), researchers are not always in a position to use probability sampling in educational research. Instead, they rely on using non-probability sampling. He also states that "in non-probability sampling, the researcher selects individuals because they are available, convenient, and represent some characteristic the investigator seeks to study".

The research instruments include structured interviews and testing. Twenty students were interviewed about their speaking problems encountered when trying to speak English. Furthermore, depending on the problems students complained about, a task-based teaching was pursued along with a training of 12 weeks, with three hours dedicated per week. Students' ability in speaking was checked twice before their exposure to the intervention and after the intervention. The participants of the current study were of similar age, ranging from 19 to 20 years. They were all Yemeni students studying English as a Foreign Language (EFL). They are all homogeneous with regard to age, sex, ethnicity, mother tongue and educational and cultural background. Also, they were homogenous with regard to exposure to English. They started studying English at grade seven and continued studying it through six years using Crescent (the current textbook in Yemeni schools) until they completed their secondary education.

Students' scores in the pre- and post- tests were calculated using SPSS. A simple paired t-test was run to measure the enhancement. According to Burnham (2015), a paired sample t-test is used when a researcher employs the one group pre-test and post-test design with matching scores.

Data Collection Methods and Procedures

Before implementing the intervention strategy, the researchers administered an interview to a group of 20 male and female students ten for each gender. They were asked about their general levels of competency in the English language, the common problems they face when they speak in English. After the interview, the researchers administered a pre-test on the sample and recorded their answers. Adopting a task-based teaching strategy for teaching speaking, the researchers used a book entitled "Person to Person Student Book Starter", (3rd Ed) by Jack Richards to teach a group of EFL students at the Faculty of Education, Socotra, Hadhramout University, for the academic year (2018/2019). The intervention lasted for a whole semester (12 weeks). The researchers planned the tasks according to a model consisting of a five-point continuum that focuses on language form and steps toward authentic communication. The researchers followed Littlewood's (2004) model to control the task during the intervention. It started by focusing on the form or (drillings) in the first step and ends by focusing on the meaning or genuine communication in the last step. Between steps one and five, students engaged in what Littlewood called 'pre-communicative language practice', 'communicative language practice' and 'structure communication' (p. 322). Students at the beginning of the task imitated a conversation spoken by native speakers to practise the pronunciation, especially the vocabulary in casual speech and

structures. As soon as the students acquired intelligible pronunciation of the mentioned words and structures, they transferred to stage two in which they were asked to perform the dialogue with their partners focusing on the meaning of the studied vocabulary and structure. In stage three, students were required to perform an information gap activity in which the learners substituted the names of people and places with real names in the class and asked 'personalised questions' about their partner's family, job, interest, or the like. In stage four, a structured role-play activity was performed, depending on the dialogue they already studied. Finally, students performed a creative role-play. They were asked real and purposeful questions that the teacher does not know like: What is the best place to visit in Socotra? In which year of the month do you advise tourists to visit Socotra?

The justification for using Littlewood's model is because the components of the model can be practiced and achieved through the prescribed text-book available for teaching speaking skills in the college. At the end of the semester, the post-test was administered on the same group of students. Results of the post-test were obtained and compared to those of the pre-test to measure the effect of task-based instruction strategy on students' overall speaking performance. The oral assessment rubric for speaking performance provided by Brown (2001) was adopted to evaluate students' oral performances on the pre-test and post-test. It has five clear assessment points which are: fluency, pronunciation, comprehension, vocabulary, and grammar.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

For data analysis tools and procedures, the researchers, for interview analysis, applied the qualitative approach of thematic analysis looking for themes and patterns of students' responses, which, according to Braun and Clarke (2006), "...is a method used for 'identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data. It minimally organises and describes the data set in (rich) detail' (p.79). The answers of the interview were transcribed from the audio-tape, then segmented and later coded. All disagreements between coders were then resolved by discussion. After that, the entire corpus of the research was coded by one of the researchers and another independent coder, resulting in the creation of five categories which represented the speaking problems of students. Students who participated in the interview were informed that data would be handled for the purpose of the study and their names and voice recordings would be kept confidential. In addition, the researchers used SPSS 19 to compare the results of both pre- and post-tests. Normality of data of the pre-test and post-test were checked through using skewness and Kurtosis. The results indicate that the data of the study were normally distributed.

Table 1. Normality of Data

	N	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Pre-test	20	-.790	.512	-.327	.992
Post-test	20	-.666	.512	-.496	.992
Valid N (listwise)	20				

Results and Discussion of Students' Problems

The first research question was addressed by an open question in the interview that explored the perceived problems students face when talking in English, i.e., "what are the problems that you face when you talk in English?" Responding to this question, students reported that they face many problems when they talk in English language. The perceived speaking problems reported were identified and categorised under five main themes as follows:

Lexical problems

Under this theme, the subjects reported that lack of vocabulary knowledge and difficulty to recall them in a specific situation when needed are problems they face when they talk in English. One of the students stated that *"I feel that I can talk in English, but at the time when I want to talk I cannot remember the words that I want to use in my speech"*. The other participant said that, *"I like to talk in English, however, when I talk, I forget the words that can be used in the right context"*. These results indicate vocabulary knowledge is an essential element to develop a good command of the spoken language. Yet, lack of vocabulary and/ or inability to recall them make it "difficult [for EFL learners] to communicate" (Saroyan, 2016, p. 231). According to Alqahtani (2015), "vocabulary knowledge is often viewed as a critical tool for second language learners because a limited vocabulary in a second language impedes successful communication" (p. 22). This is, according to Nation (2001), due to the complementary relationship between vocabulary knowledge and language use, where vocabulary knowledge encourages language use and language use allows for vocabulary gain. The result of the study confirms the findings of Tuan and Mai (2015), Al Hosni (2014), Wang (2014) and Gan (2012) studies that one of the significant and main speaking problems was students' lack of vocabulary knowledge and inability to remember the vocabulary when they speak. This is true, for students have identified themselves as beginners to have inadequate vocabulary, which might relate to their previous education in terms of vocabulary instruction and lack of exposure to and practice of a language in real life situations. The result suggests that EFL students need to be involved in tasks and strategies to help them build and organise their mental lexicon and they need to rely on the target language translation not on direct translation from their L1.

Phonological Problems

With respect to phonological problems, students reported that they face difficulty in pronouncing multi-syllabic words and inability to say mono- and di-syllabic ones properly, as well. A sample of students' answers to the question related to phonological problems illustrates the difficulty that students face in pronouncing words. One of the students said, *"I try to speak English, but my problem is in the way to pronounce words. I usually pronounce words wrongly, particularly the long words which have more than one syllable"*. The other student stated that, *"my problem is in pronouncing the words. In most cases, I pronounce most of the words wrongly. That is because I cannot control the use of stress in most of the words"*. Given that students identified themselves as beginners, it is obvious that they face difficulty in learning the new sound system of a new language. One of the reasons behind pronunciation problems that EFL learners face can be related to differences between English and Arabic sound systems, as confirmed by Alduais & Al-Shamiry (2013) and Al-Tamimi & Attamimi, (2018). In addition, "pronunciation difficulties experienced by learners are better seen as due to the need to learn a particular feature or combination of features than as the absence of particular phonemes" (Roach, 2009, p. 114). Further, the pronunciation problem could be related to the lack of exposure to listening materials

in high school, as we noticed that most Yemeni high school teachers do not use the cassettes associated with the course prescribed nor do they incorporate any technology to enhance listening to develop pronunciation. The reasons behind this are lack of facilities like cassette players and/or other audio-visual materials in schools, as well as teachers' ignorance of the importance of listening as a tool to develop pronunciation and speaking (Cheekeong, et al. 2014; Bin-Tahir & Hanapi, 2017; Hwaider, 2017). The result suggests, "...correct pronunciation must be constantly practised since comprehension and speaking is possible if the learner has adequate pronunciation in the target language" (Abdireimov, 2006, p. 35). Therefore, pronunciation should be incorporated in teachers' instructional methods with the aim to encourage students to "work towards an intelligible pronunciation rather than achieve a native-speaker quality" (Sárosdy et al. 2006, p. 77). This would contribute to building a solid base for effective interaction in the classroom, which, in turn, helps students enhance their speaking skills (Harper, 2004).

Syntactic Problems

In this regard, it was found that the most frequent problem reported by students was the difficulty to produce grammatically correct and well-structured utterances. This is confirmed by the answers of students. Here is an example of the answer of one student by saying "*My grammar is not good. I make many mistakes when I talk in English, especially, when I am trying to make long talk in front of students or teachers*". Another student said, "*I know well the grammatical rules of the language, but when I talk in English, I usually make many mistakes in grammar, such as subject-verb agreement, the use of tenses and pronouns*". It was noticed that some students have inadequate grammar knowledge and practice in subject-verb agreement and the use of verb tenses. When speaking, however, they usually fail to follow the rules of grammar, and unconsciously mix using verbs and switch between tenses. This means that they either did not internalise the rules well or were not able to recall them at the time of speaking. The result conforms to the findings of Gan (2012), Wang (2014), Al Hosni (2014), and Tuan and Mai (2015). The studies found that lack of knowledge in grammar and sentence structure were behind students' weakness and under developed performance in speaking. The result could relate to the way grammar was presented to students in high schools; it is noticed that, teachers' main focus is on language rules, yet in isolation from their social context, which makes students only learn the rule, but they do not use it for communication purposes. This indicates that "teachers are not aware enough that focusing on teaching the form does not necessarily result in using it, and that's why students need to be engaged in communication—in order to improve their speaking skill" (Al Hosni, 2014, p. 27). In addition, the result could relate to the bad admission policy of Yemeni universities where, according to Rabab'ah (2002), high school students admitted to that English departments lack the adequate number and variety of required skills, as well as the pertinent information to cope with the ongoing and ever-changing needs of an English programme, which makes the task of college instructors to develop such under-prepared students even more challenging.

Coherence and Cohesion Problems

It is obvious that "if the speaker wants to deliver a speech or an oral presentation, he is expected to connect sentences and paragraphs to make the [discourse] cohesive" (Sárosdy et al, 2006, p.58) and comprehensible to the listener. Our students, as they have reported, face difficulty to keep the conversation going and maintain the flow of the ideas when they try to speak in English. One of the students replied to the question by saying "*I try to speak and practise my speaking skill at*

college and outside college. I still have a problem of keeping my talk. That means I cannot talk for long time and keep my speech going from one idea to another in an understandable way". Another participant said that, *"when I talk in English, I usually lose the organisation of the ideas and also I cannot connect these ideas together.* This means that students lack the "oral communication strategies" (Albino, 2017, p. 3) to quickly process and manage the discourse from the side of both listener and speaker to sustain the interaction. The result also explains that students "lack the necessary vocabulary... to keep the interaction going"(Al Hosni, 2014, p. 24), which supports the previous perceived problem of lack of vocabulary. Teachers, in this case, need to develop students' strategic competence and train them on the "various techniques of turn-taking and processing discourse [by involving them in] action response [strategy in terms of what is] preferred or not preferred" (Sárosdy et al, 2006, p. 58) as techniques for sustaining the flow of the conversation.

Psychology-Related Problems

It has been found that lack of confidence and feeling ashamed to talk and fear of making mistakes when talking were among the perceived speaking problems reported by students, which stumble in their speaking ability. A participant in the interview said *"I feel ashamed in talking to a group of students because I feel afraid of making mistakes in grammar or pronunciation. Sometimes, I lose confidence and cannot talk anymore".* Another participant said, *"I feel shy to speak in front of a group of people and even in the classroom because I am not that good in spoken English and I feel afraid of making mistakes".* The result of the study echoes the findings of Tuan and Mai (2015), Al Hosni (2014), and Zhang and Liu (2008) that worry about making mistakes, fear of criticism, and lack of confidence that were amongst the speaking problems students encounter when speaking in the classroom. The result suggests that students need to develop self-confidence and overcome their fears of "being criticized by their peers or teachers because of their spelling, pronunciation and grammar mistakes, [or] poor vocabulary" (Pysarchyk & Yamshynska, 2015, p. 76) to overcome the "negative motivation"[like] "loss of self-esteem and fear of making errors" (Spolsky & Hult, 2008, p. 639).

Results and Discussion of the Effect of TBLT

To answer the second question of the study, which states, "To what extent does the task-based instruction strategy enhance students' competence in speaking?", a paired-samples t-test was used to determine whether the difference between the pre- and post-test scores was significant as a result of the task-based intervention strategy of teaching speaking. Table 2 below shows a mean score of the pre-test and post-test. As depicted in Table 2, the mean score of the students in the pre-test is 67.75 and the mean score of the post test is 78.65 indicated an improvement of students' speaking skill after they have received ample practices through TBLT activities.

Table 2. Mean score of pre and post-test Results

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1 PRE-TEST	67.7500	20	22.94358	5.13034
POST-TEST	78.6500	20	17.48164	3.90901

To determine whether the results obtained in the post-test have statistically significant differences, a paired sample t-test was used to analyse the results. The result in Table 3 shows that there is a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores, $t(19) = -5.35$, $p =$

0.00, meaning that students scored significantly higher on the post-test ($M = 78.65$, $SD = 17.48$) than on the pre-test ($M = 67.75$, $SD = 22.94$). The effect size was calculated using the formula "for the t-test statistic, [where] the effect size (ES) can be calculated with the equation: $ES = \text{Mean [1]} - \text{Mean [2]} / \text{Standard Deviation weighted}$ " (Creswell, 2012, p. 195). The effect size obtained was ($ES = .53$), which is very large. That is, "students scored about [.53] standard deviations higher" (Randolph, 2009, p. 10) on their speaking post-test after receiving the speaking task-based instruction than before using the strategy. The result of the study conforms to the studies of Aliakbari and Jamalvandi, (2010), Lou, et al., (2016), and Yousif, (2017) who found that using task-based instruction was effective in developing EFL learners' speaking skills. The result means that the use of task-based instruction strategy, considering the limitations of the research design, partly contributed to the development of EFL students' overall speaking competence.

Table 3, Paired Samples Test of the Pre-test-and Post-Test Results

	Paired Differences					T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Pair 1 PRE-TEST - POST-TEST	-10.90000	9.11274	2.03767	-15.16490	-6.63510	-5.349	19	.000

Implications

The study has implications for EFL learners, teachers and curriculum designers as well as for research. First, it increases students' and teachers' awareness about the nature of spoken language as a complex process that necessitates the use of strategies and exposure to language as key factors to master the spoken language, and to what extent speaking could be problematic, especially to less-motivated students. Second, the findings of the study inspire teachers to seek opportunities for educational development to be able to adopt new teaching methods and apply them in the classroom to enhance students' speaking competence levels. Third, for curriculum designers, the study encourages the incorporation of task-based instruction in teaching speaking as part of the syllabus for language teaching and learning so as for EFL learners have adequate practice in the classroom and be exposed to authentic language as they expect to use it outside the classroom.

Further, the findings of the study could be applicable to high school teachers and learners in the Yemeni context, as the sample involved was first-year college students who are close in their levels in English and that previous education was proven to be a source of many problems EFL students face in speaking when joining colleges. Therefore, task-based instruction can be of great help for high school students, if adopted, in that it builds their reserves of communicative competence and prepares them for colleges of languages, especially the ones demanding English language proficiency like- in addition to colleges of language and education medicine-engineering, pharmacology, information technology, and the like.

Fourth, for research, the study adds a value to the existing body of literature in the field of speaking instruction in a new EFL context. It also allows for the emergence of new studies with

best practices in the field of English language teaching and learning for it generates more questions than it answers. Researchers in the Yemeni context should consider the limitations of the study in terms of sample size and design in their future attempts when addressing similar or related topics. For the sample, the study addressed first year college students who just graduated from high schools, which would be inspiring for researchers to address both high school and college students in their research to find out links for improving EFL instruction in both sectors. With regard to the field addressed, the study shed the light on task-based instruction to improve one of the English language skills. Therefore, examining the same strategy on other skills or examining new strategies on the same skill remain a challenge for researchers and is worth investigating.

Fifth, the direct implication for research would be that speaking problems encountered by Yemeni students are commonly shared by other students in other parts of the world, particularly EFL contexts. The evidence derived from the present study shows that TBLT seems to be effective for enhancing speaking skills and emphasising the fact that this method of teaching is concentrated on the improvement of students' communicative competence. Therefore, it is encouraging to call for the implementation of the TBLT at Yemeni universities. The study adds to the scientific literature supporting the value of TBLT. The research occurred within a university setting, and the intervention was shown to be portable (i.e., effective despite the low speaking level of students before the experiment), and viable (i.e., able to be incorporated into existing university structure and timetable).

Limitations of the Study

The study, as the case with the one group pretest-posttest design, has its limitations. Threats to internal validity like history, maturation, and testing effects cannot be ruled out as constituting possible alternative explanations that contributed to students' oral development. Another threat to internal validity is the lack of a control group that could help in controlling extraneous variables. In addition, the study has limitations pertaining to external validity as it involved a small sample size of students taken from a single college in a university. This makes the results not generalisable to a wider population and not even to the university population itself for the reason stated above. With all that has been stated above in mind, the study still offers its own contributions to the body of research knowledge, as well as implications for students, teachers, and curriculum designers. The study also allows further researches to emerge, which makes the insight gain from the study valuable.

Recommendations and Suggestions for Further Research

Based on the findings of the study, the research suggests that speaking is an important skill in language learning that EFL teachers should help their students to master it. Task-based instruction should be adopted in high schools and colleges as a method to enhance students' communicative competence. Secondary school teachers should be involved in training programmes of teaching methods to be able to use such new emerging trends in teaching. EFL students should be involved in deciding on the courses they want to learn, especially at a college level.

Further, the study recommends a further study to be conducted on a larger sample of students from different colleges of education of the same university (Hadhramout University) for

comparison and confirmation of the results of this study. Another research study should also be conducted involving control-group design in other universities like, Seiyun, Aden or Sana'a to rule out threats to validity. The study also recommends that other teaching strategies should be tested for their effectiveness on students' oral communication skills and other language skills and task-based instruction should be tested for effects on other language skills.

It is worth recommending that a similar research study with control group design should address high school students taking a representative sample of all levels for more valid results on high school graduates.

CONCLUSION

The study aimed to enrich the body of literature available so far on "English speaking problems of ESL students attending teacher [education] programs at tertiary level" (Gan, 2012, p. 53), and ways to enhance students' ability in speaking. The challenges students reported they face when speaking in this study, i.e., lexical, phonological, syntactical, coherence and cohesion, and psychological problems could relate to the argument that speaking, on the one hand, is a very difficult task for EFL learners, in general, and first-year college students, in particular. On the other hand, "developing speaking skills is very difficult task [.. for teachers, for it..] lack[s] quality control [... and..] clear criteria for assessment" (Sárosdy et al, 2006, p. 59), and needs teachers to be qualified well and proficient enough to engage students in real-like communicative activities and be cautious about the assessment tools used to measure EFL students' speaking competence.

However, if learners are motivated enough, these problems can be overcome to a great extent, and spoken language can be enhanced by involving students in sound, relevant speaking courses that meet their learning needs and expectations. "[L]earning is enhanced when learners are involved in the decision-making process and the content of courses is directly related to their immediate needs and context" (Richards & Renandya, 2002, p. 192). Thus, developing students' communicative competence needs students to be motivated in the first place and lack of either could hinder attaining the ultimate goal of speaking. That is, without learners' motivation and positive attitudes towards speaking in English, developing communicative competence alone will not lead to realising the ultimate goal of native-like speaking.

There is a need to bridge the educational gap represented in the challenge imposed by secondary education in terms of high school teachers who have a low proficiency level in the language as well as the high school students who graduated with inadequate linguistic and strategic competence. This imposes a double-edged challenge where old teachers need to be updated and new ones need to be created. The great part of responsibility, thus, lies on teacher- education programmes, in which high school teachers are prepared, to train them on new teaching methodologies that involve "contextualized language learning" (Archibald, et al., 2008, p. 2), and encourage effective use of strategic teaching to boost communicative competence, which in turn, reflects on high school graduates coming to the universities. This, we believe, forms the milestone to deal with the source of most English language learning and teaching problems as reported by many researches (Al-Mansoori, 2008; Almehwari, 2005; Awadh, 2000; Gubaily, 2012) and observed by the researchers in the Yemeni context.

Therefore, teacher education programmes in our universities should focus on how to engage students in relevant meaningful tasks. These tasks should improve the "production of correct language forms"[..with..] objectives of communicative language use" (Ur, 1991, p. 188), in real setting. This can stimulate "natural acquisition process" (Rohani, 2011 as cited in Albino, 2017, p. 3) of language to develop students' speaking fluency and accuracy alike as both, according to Mazouzi (2013) as cited in Leong & Ahmadi, (2017, p.36), "are important elements of communicative approach".

References

- Abdireimov, J. (2006). *Lectures on "Methods of teaching English"*. Karakalpak, Uzbekistan: Ministry of Higher and Secondary Education of Uzbekistan.
- Abdullah, N., & Patil V. N. (2012). English language teaching in Yemen: Importance and challenges. *International Journal of Social Science Tomorrow*, 1(5), 1-8. <http://www.ijssst.com>
- Adiantika, H. N., & Purnomo, H. (2018). The implementation of task-based instruction in EFL teaching speaking skill. *Indonesian EFL Journal*, 4(2), 12-22. doi: 10.25134/iefj.v4i2.1371.
- Ahmed, S. T. S. (2018). Challenges of English language teaching in Yemeni primary and secondary schools. Retrieved from <http://www.grin.com/document/444271>.
- Al-Alami, S. (2015). Research within the field of applied linguistics: Points to consider. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, (7), 1330-1337.
- Albino, G. (2017). Improving speaking fluency in a task-based language teaching Approach: The case of EFL learners at PUNIV-Cazenga. *SAGE Open*, 7(2), 1-11. doi.org/10.1177/2158244017691077
- Alduais, Ahmed M. S., & Al-Shamiry, R. (2013). ESL Yemeni learners' perceptions and perspectives on the importance of learning stress and intonation as supra-segmental features of speech and sound attributes to the process of comprehension: A survey study. *International research in education*, 1(1), 52-74. doi.org/10.5296/ijssr.v1i1.3631
- Al Hosni, S. (2014). Speaking difficulties encountered by young EFL learners. *International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature*, 2(6), 22-30.
- Aliakbari, M., & Jamalvandi, B. (2010). The impact of 'role play' on fostering EFL learners' speaking ability; a task-based approach. *Journal of Pan-Pacific Association of Applied Linguistics*, 14(1), 15-29.
- Al-Mansoori, N. A. (2008). *Reasons of poor achievement in English by students of the scientific departments at Aden College of Education from the viewpoint of teachers and students* (Unpublished master thesis). Aden University, Aden, Yemen.
- Almehwari, W. (2005). *The problems of English language teaching in English departments of faculties of education as seen by the teaching staff and the students* (Unpublished master thesis). Aden University, Aden, Yemen.
- Alqahtani, M. (2015). The importance of vocabulary in language learning and how to be taught. *International Journal of Teaching and Education*, III(3), 21-34.
- Al-Tamimi, N. O. M. (2014). Public speaking instruction: abridge to improve English speaking competence and reducing communication apprehension. *International Journal of Linguistics and Communication*, 2(4), 45-68. doi.org/10.15640/ijlc.v2n4a4.

- Al-Tamimi, N. O. M., & Attamimi, R. A. (2018). Using explicit pronunciation instructions to develop students' English speaking competencies: A quasi-Experimental study: *International Journal of English Language Teaching*, 6(4), 57-73.
- Archibald, J., Bashutski, K., Guo, Y., Jaques, C., Johnson, C., McPherson, & M., Shea, C. (2008). *A Review of the Literature on English as a Second Language Issues*. The Language Research Centre at the University of Calgary, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. Retrieved from https://education.alberta.ca/media/903123/esl_litreview.pdf
- Awadh, A. (2000). *Problems of teaching English in Aden secondary schools as perceived by teachers and supervisors* (Unpublished MA thesis). Aden University, Aden, Yemen.
- Cheekeong, Y., Abdulrahman, T. T. A., & Yassin, A. A. (2014). Oral communication problems of Yemeni high school EFL students in Malaysia. *Journal of Applied Sciences*, 14(24), 3620-3626.
- Bataineh R. F.; Bataineh, R. F., & Thabet, S. S. (2011). Communicative language teaching in the Yemeni EFL classroom: Embraced or merely lip-serviced? *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 2(4), 859-866, doi:10.4304/jltr.2.4.859-866.
- Bin-Hady, W. R. A. (2016). *Communicative competence in teaching English at secondary schools: A critical investigation in Yaff'ae district of Yemen*. Munich, Grin Verlag Germany. doi:10.13140/RG.2.2.17234.40645.
- Bin-Tahir, S. Z., & Hanapi. (2017). Lecturers' method in teaching speaking at the University of Iqra Buru. *International Journal of English Linguistics*, 7(2), 73–80. doi.org/10.5539/ijel.v7n2p73.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3, 77-101.
- Brown, H. (2001). *Teaching by Principles: An interactive approach to language pedagogy* (2nd ed.). White Plains, NY: Addison-Wesley.
- Burnham, B. R. (2015). *Fundamental Statistics for behavioral sciences*. Creative Commons. Retrieved from <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/>
- Creswell, J. W. (2012). *Educational research: planning, conducting, evaluating quantitative and qualitative research*. Boston, MA: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Gan, Z. (2012). Understanding L2 speaking problems: Implications for ESL curriculum development in a teacher training institution in Hong Kong. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 37(1), 43-59. doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2012v37n1.4.
- Gubaily, M. A. (2012). Challenges of teaching and learning spoken English in Yemen. *International Journal of Social Science Tomorrow*, 1(3), 1-8.
- Harper, A. G. (2004). Call based pronunciation exercises and their effectiveness for beginning ESL learners. *Proceedings of CLASIC* (pp. 948-953). Cyberjaya Malaysia: Centre for Modern Languages and Communications Multimedia University.
- Hwaider, S. M. (2017). Problems of teaching the listening skill to Yemeni EFL learners. *International Journal of Scientific and research publication*, 7(6), 140-148.
- Leong, L.-M., & Ahmadi, S. M. (2017). An analysis of factors influencing learners' English speaking skill. *International Journal of Research in Higher Education*, 2(1), 34-41.
- Lin, Z. (2009). Task based approach in foreign language teaching in China. Retrieved from <http://minds.winconsin.edu/bitstream/handle/1793/34571/Zhu.%20Lin>.
- Littlewood, W. (2004). The task-based approach: Some questions and suggestions. *ELT Journal*, 58(4), 319–326. doi.org/10.1093/elt/58.4.319.

- Lou, Y. G., Chen, P., & Chen, L. Y. (2016). Effects of a task-based approach to non-English-major graduates' Oral English performance. *Creative Education*, 7, 660-668. doi.org/10.4236/ce.2016.74069.
- Marsden, E., & Torgerson, C. J. (2012). Single group, pre- and post-test research designs: Some methodological concerns, *Oxford Review of Education*, 38(5), 583-616. doi.org/10.1080/03054985.2012.731208.
- Nation, I. S. P. (2001). *The goals of vocabulary learning*. In M. H. Long & J. C. Richards (Eds.), *Learning vocabulary in another language* (1st ed., pp. 6-22). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Nunan, D. (1991). Communicative tasks and the language curriculum. *TESOL Quarterly*, 25(2), 279-295. doi.org/10.2307/3587464.
- Pysarchyk, O., & Yamshynska, N. (2015). Students' "language barrier": Psychological factors and solutions. *Journal of the national technical university of Ukraine "KPI" philology and educational studies*, 6, 74-79. <http://visnyk.fl.kpi.ua>
- Rabab'ah, G. (2002). Communication problems facing Arab learners of English. *Journal of Language and Learning*, 3(1), 180-197.
- Randolph, J. J. (2009). A guide to writing the dissertation literature review. *A Practical Assessment, Research & Evaluation*, 14(13), 1-13.
- Richards, J. C., & Renandya, W. A. (Eds.). (2002). *Methodology in language teaching: An anthology of current practice*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Roach, P. (2009). *English phonetics and phonology: A practical course* (4th Ed). Edinburgh: Cambridge University Press.
- Sárosdy, J., Bencze, T. F., Poór, Z., & Vadnay, M. (2006). Applied Linguistics I for BA Students in English. *Bölcsész Konzorcium*, Germany.
- Saroyan, S. (2016). How to teach vocabulary effectively. *Actual scientific research in the modern world*, 20, 230-235. Retrieved from http://publications.yosu.am/wpcontent/uploads/2016/06/27.Satenik_Saroyan.pdf
- Spolsky, B., & Hult, F. M. (Eds.). (2008). *The handbook of educational linguistics*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing.
- Tabrizi, A. R.N., & Nasiri, M. (2011). The effect of using task-based activities on speaking proficiency of EFL learners. *Proceedings of the Third Asian Conference on Education*. Osaka, Japan, 333-345. (The international academic forum). Retrieved from http://iafor.org/ace_proceedings.html
- Tuan, N. H., & Mai, T. N. (2015). Factors affecting students' speaking performance at LE Thanh Hein High School. *Asian Journal of Educational Research*, 3(2), 8-23.
- Ur, P. (1991). *A course in language teaching: Practice and theory*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Wang, Z. (2014). Developing accuracy and fluency in spoken English of Chinese EFL learners. *English language teaching*, 7(2), 110-118.
- Willis, J. (1996). *A framework for task-based learning*. London, Longman.
- Yousif, A. S. A. (2017). *The effect of communicative task-based instruction on developing students' oral communication skills at Sudanese universities* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Sudan University of Science and Technology, Khrtoom, Sudan.
- Zhang, W., & Liu, M. (2008). An exploration of Chinese EFL learners' foreign language anxiety, personality and self-esteem. *Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 5(2), 181-203.

Zuheer, K. M. (2008). *The Effect of using a program based on cooperative learning strategy on developing some oral communication skills of students* (Unpublished MA thesis). Education- Assuit University, Assuit, Egypt.