



# Self-Esteem and Its Relationship to English Oral Performance among Yemeni EFL Undergraduate Learners

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**Abstract:** The present study aims to explore the level of self-esteem among Yemeni EFL university students and determine whether females and males significantly vary in their self-esteem. It also examines the level of the Yemeni Arabic-speaking EFL university students in English oral performance and its relationship with their self-esteem. For the data collection, three instruments have been used. First, 50 Yemeni EFL undergraduate students (female=38; male=12) completed the self-esteem scale (SES) developed by the researcher along with the standardized Self-esteem Scale by Rosenberg(1965). Then, an oral test was set to test students' performance in English speaking skill. The third tool is a spoken test checklist prepared to score the students' oral performance. The data collected were statistically processed by using SPSS. The results obtained show that: (a) Yemeni EFL undergraduate learners show high self-esteem degree ( $M=2.90$  (out of 5), percentage 73%) in both dimensions (c) No significant differences have been found between females' and males' self-esteem, (d) There is a very slight difference between female and male towards their perception towards themselves, but it is not significant, (e) The level of Yemeni EFL undergraduate learners in speaking skill is a bit low ( $M= 9.94$  (out of 20);  $SD=2.4$ ; percentage 49.4%), (f) There is a significant relationship between self-esteem and spoken performance by Yemeni EFL learners ( $r=.365$ ,  $p\text{-value}=.009<0.01$ ). As a whole, this study contributed to the ESL/EFL by providing information on Yemeni Arabic-speaking undergraduate female and male EFL learners in terms of their self-esteem and their oral communication performance.

**Keywords:** self-esteem, self-perception, other's perception of oneself, EFL undergraduate learners, oral performance.

## 1. Introduction

Effective variables and the necessity of focusing on learners' emotional states are readily acknowledged by the language teaching community. Researchers and psychologists have struggled toward agreement on the definition and measurement of self-esteem. They agree that self-esteem is one of the affective factors influencing learners' life, social relations and overall success, particularly his/her academic success. Coopersmith (1967) defines self-esteem as:

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*'The evaluation which the individual makes and customarily maintains with regard to himself; it expresses an attitude of approval or disapproval and indicates the extent to successful and worthy. In short, self-esteem is a personal judgment of worthiness that is expressed in the attitudes that the individual holds toward himself.'* (p.3)

Studies have shown that it could be claimed easily that no successful cognitive or effective activity can be carried out without some degree of self-esteem, self-confidence, knowledge of oneself and belief in one's own capabilities for that activity. The issue of self-esteem still needs to be investigated more in the Arab world as well as in Yemen. Research in other contexts has shown theoretical results regarding self-esteem in language learning; however, it is neither known about the real degree of self-esteem of English language learners in Yemeni universities nor about the differences between male and female students regarding self-esteem in respect to the two subscales of self-esteem, 'self-perception' and 'others' perception of oneself'. Arnold (1999) indicates that working with self-esteem, being one of the affective factors is connected to providing a supportive atmosphere in which a learner can be encouraged to work hard to reach his/her learning potential unhindered by the negative effect. Similarly, Mayers (1992) and Rosenberg (1965) argue that self-esteem is generally described as an individual's personal evaluation of him/herself. A person evaluates him/herself on basis of their sense of their own worth, value, importance or capabilities.

Furthermore, psychologists and educationists claim that learners should have a certain level of self-esteem to achieve academic success, in which self-esteem and achievement go hand in hand. The question raised here is what extent Yemeni EFL learners' self-esteem is in English language learning contexts. Although several studies deal with teaching/learning issues in language classrooms, little to no literature was found on the issue of self-esteem in Yemeni EFL contexts. This study tries to explore the actual level of self-esteem among Yemeni learners majoring in the English language learning environment in Yemen, in addition to the kind of relationship between the Yemeni EFL students' oral performance and their self-esteem. The factor of gender concerning self-esteem is studied as well. This study is one of the few studies and the first of its kind to be conducted in Yemen. It may give more insights into the importance of self-esteem in EFL learning in general and learners' speaking performance in particular. The findings of this study may help parents, English instructors and curriculum designers to be aware of the subject of self-esteem to improve learners' academic success, as well as to enhance the process of teaching and learning of spoken English in the Yemeni learning contexts. It will also shed more light on speaking and how to deal with it as one of the English skills that should be improved from a psychological perspective.

## **1. Literature Review**

A large body of studies have investigated the issue of self-esteem and its effect on individual and their academic success (Aronson, 2002; Kimura, 2007; El-Anzi, 2005, Mirlashari, 2007; Arshad, Zaidi & Mahmoud, 2015; Al-rabai, 2017; Zeng et al; 2020; Caisido (2020)). Researchers have different findings regarding self-esteem whether it is a cause or a result of academic achievement. Aronson (2002) concluded that self-esteem is the critical ingredient and the primary cause of academic achievement so that teachers' practices and academic strategies should be aimed at fostering students' self-esteem. Kimura (2007) pointed to self-esteem necessity in educational institutions. His study showed that students' self-esteem not only affects their academic achievement but also students become to be risk-takers according to the degree of self-esteem everyone has. El-Anzi (2005) pointed out to the significant existing relationship between academic achievement

and self-esteem among Arab Kuwaiti college students. Self-esteem can lead to achievement gains as Mirlashari (2007) indicated in his study. Other studies have investigated the nature of this relationship and indicated that the higher the self-esteem, the more successful learners are. A high self-esteem causes good academic performance as there is a positive relationship between self-esteem and academic achievement in university students (Arshad, Zaidi & Mahmoud, 2015). One of the very few studies conducted in Arab EFL learning contexts on self-esteem factors is Al-rabai's (2017) study. He revealed in his study that there is a strong positive correlation between Arab Saudi learners' self-esteem and their EFL achievement but no significant differences were found between male and female learners. Zeng et al. (2020) examined the bidirectional associations between self-esteem and academic achievement. They ascertained that young students with high self-esteem show relative increases in grades and test scores and by getting better scores, their self-views get promoted positively. Caisido (2020) analyzes 20 studies on self-esteem related to three trends, language learning skills, second or foreign language proficiency and emotional variables. The analysis was summed up that there is a consistent relationship between self-esteem and each of the three domains. Unlikely, Kariuki et al (2019) found out that self-esteem has no significant influence on students' academic performance in secondary schools in their study conducted in Kenya.

A good number of research was conducted to examine the relationship between self-esteem and speaking performance among EFL learners (Malki & Mohammdi, 2009; Koosha et al., 2011; Mandokhail et al., 2018; Satriani, 2019; Wullur, 2014). In a study conducted on Iranian students who carried out an oral proficiency test and responded to self-esteem and anxiety surveys, it was found that the learners with high scores showed higher self-esteem and low anxiety than those who got low scores and showed low self-esteem and high anxiety in performing oral communication tasks (Malki & Mohammdi, 2009). Koosha et al. (2011) found out that fluency of speaking is affected by self-esteem only while less significant impact is found on other sub-skills of speaking. Mandokhail et al (2018), Satriani (2019) indicated in their research that there is a significant correlation between self-esteem and the learners' oral performance in English language. On the other hand, Wullur (2014) revealed in his study that there is a positive and significant relationship with different aspects of language learning for instance; pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar but there is a weak correlation with fluency in speaking ability.

As the association between self-esteem and English learning success is undeniable, there is an urgent need for further research on learners' self-esteem and its relationship with English language learning in Yemen. Thus, the current study is willing to take a part in this regard by examining self-esteem in Yemeni EFL classrooms and whether gender variable makes any difference. It will also explore the actual level of those learners in English oral communication skills and find out if there is any relationship between learners' self-esteem and their English oral performance.

### **1.1. Objectives of the Study:**

This study specifically aims at:

1. Investigating the level of self-esteem among Yemeni undergraduate EFL learners.
2. Finding out if there are any significant differences among Yemeni university EFL learners' self-esteem in respective to their gender.
3. Investigating the level of oral performance among Yemeni university EFL learners.
4. Examining if there is any significant relationship between self-esteem and speaking performance among Yemeni EFL university learners.

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## 1.2. Research Questions:

The study seeks answers to the following questions:

5. What is the level of self-esteem among Yemeni undergraduate EFL students?
6. Are there any significant differences between Yemeni males' and females' self-esteem?
7. What is the level of oral performance among Yemeni undergraduate EFL learners?
8. Is there any relationship between overall self-esteem of Yemeni undergraduate EFL learners' and their English oral performance?

## 2. Methodology:

### 2.1. Research Design:

The design of the present study is correlational as it involves investigating the relationship between self-esteem and English oral performance among Yemeni undergraduate EFL learners. To measure the nature of the relationship between the two variables of the study, a quantitative research using a questionnaire survey is utilized. Descriptive statistics (Mean & standard deviation) was used to describe the characteristics of the sample in both variables. Correlation analysis was used to determine the type and direction of the relationship between the variables. A t-test was used to find out the variation of self-esteem among learners in terms of gender variable. Non-parametric Statistics (Mann Whitney Test) was used to compare mean scores of both females and males in self-esteem scale as the sample is not equal in number.

### 2.2. Population & sample

Participants in this study are the fourth-year students of English department, Faculty of Education, Sana'a University. The subjects consisted of 50 (females= 38; males =12) Yemeni undergraduate students from the English department at level four in Sana'a university. Their ages ranged from 22 to 23 years. The sample shares same local culture, learning circumstances, English curriculum for more than 9 years and speak Arabic as their mother tongue. The procedure used to choose the sample was a random sampling approach for females in which every third name in the attendance list was chosen. For males, all were selected due to their few number in which all in all was 12. The students were requested to respond to the Arabic version 41-item-questionnaire on self-esteem within 15 minutes. They were insured that their responses would be kept confidential and for research purposes. The oral test lasted for an hour and 35 minutes in which every two students were given 5 minutes to speak about any topic they chose from a list. Regardless of the fact that the study subjects were from only one area of Yemen, the sample in the current study could be considered representative of the population of Yemeni students attending other universities in the country.

### 2.3. Data Collection Instruments

Three instruments were used to obtain data for the current study.

1. The instrument used for this study was a well-structured scale adapted by the researcher to include 30 items in addition to 10 items from the standardized test of self-esteem scale by Rosenberg (1965). The scale focused on two dimensions:
  - a. Self-perception (22 items) refers to 'the presentation of how someone feels about him/herself which sent to the mind in the form of an idea or image' by (the National Adult literacy & learning disabilities Center, 1995).

- b. Other's perception of oneself (19 items) refers to 'a person's self-esteem is a product of how that person believes others see him/her. It is the context in which an individual lives that can affect his/her self-esteem' (Rosenberg, 1965).
2. The second instrument is an 'oral test'. Students were given five minutes to speak freely about any topic they selected from a list chosen from a TOEFL proficiency test. Every two students were given 5 minutes to share their ideas and express their opinions in pair work. Three raters, in addition to a fourth one worked as an interlocutor, were listening to the learners and score their answers on a spoken test checklist prepared by the researcher.
3. An English Spoken Test Checklist is prepared to score the test by three evaluators. The spoken checklist includes five categories (organization, accuracy, fluency, appropriateness and presentation). Each category was subdivided into a number of subcategories.

#### **2.4. Reliability & Validity:**

After collecting the suitable and sufficient statements (41) of self-esteem scale, it was necessary to get it validated, by different experts in order to examine the scientific accuracy of the scale and to find out whether each statement is convenient and valid for the selected sample. All the statements were made sure to be clear, specific and simple to be understood to avoid ambiguity or negation. All the items were prepared and modified to be relevant to the scale and the two dimensions. To avoid some accidental errors and increase the measurement validity, five experts in English language, education & psychology were consulted. The scale was arranged as a four-point one (strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree). Each statement has four choices where students have to select only one of the four. To check reliability, a pilot study was conducted consisting of 12 students selected out of the sample randomly. According to piloting, some of the statements had to be paraphrased to avoid ambiguity or negation. Translating the scale into the learners' mother tongue was done as per the instructions of the experts to guarantee full comprehension to all questions in the scale. With a time span of one month, the scale was administered again to the same piloting sample and reliability was found to be .84 which indicated that the scale was reliable to be administered to the sample. For the oral test, topics were quoted from TOEFL exam, it was validated by the teachers of the English department of Faculty of Education. Then, the same sample in pilot study was requested to try the test and discuss the topics included. These 12 students were excluded from the actual sample of the study. Reliability of the oral test was found .88.

#### **2.5. Scoring:**

To score self-esteem responses, a rating scale from (4) to (1) was developed; for the alternatives as the following: Strongly Agree 4, Agree 3, Disagree 2, strongly Disagree 1. For the sake of evaluating the spoken test of the participants, an English spoken test checklist was developed. In that checklist, four categories were taken into consideration. First is 'Organization' which is subdivided into 'Ideas, Clarity & Effectiveness'. The second is 'Accuracy' which has three sub-components: 'Grammatical Correctness (Tense, Agreement), Control of Structures & Words (Word Order, Range of Vocabulary, and Word Choice) and Phonetic Correctness (Pronunciation, Stress and Intonation). The third component is 'Fluency' which is measured against '*Speed, Pauses, Repetition and Repair*'.

The fourth component is 'Appropriateness'. This component is measured against two sub-components; '*Relevance to the context*' and '*Comprehensiveness*'. The last component is 'Presentation' which is divided into *Body language and Confidence*. The checklist was handed to three evaluators for evaluation and judgment, while a fourth one was to act as an interlocutor. Total marks accorded to different categories and sub-categories were 100 which were later divided by 5 to bring it down to 20. The three co-coders evaluated spoken proficiency of the sample using the same checklist to ensure the objectivity and reliability of the checklist. The allotted time for each two students' to talk was 5 minutes.

## 2.6. Statistical Analysis :

The data were analyzed by using SPSS statistical program. A) Descriptive statistics; means and standard deviations were utilized to analyze the learners' self-esteem scale. B) A t-test was used to determine if there is any significant difference between females and males regarding their self-esteem in respect to its two dimensions (self-perception and other's perception of oneself). C) Pearson Correlation between self-esteem and spoken performance was computed to determine the relationship between the two variables. D) Non-parametric statistics-Mann Whitney was used when sample is not normally distributed in order to compare mean scores of both females and males in self-esteem scale.

## 3. Results & Discussion:

In this section, the mean and frequency distribution of the sample are presented to show the overall level of self-esteem of Yemeni EFL learners. The results and discussion are reported on the basis of the key questions that were formulated earlier. To interpret the overall mean scores of self-esteem as well as the two dimensions of self-esteem, a four-likert scale was used for use in the questionnaire based on the ranking scale in the presented study.

Table 1. shows the 4-Point	
1.0-1.9	low
2.0-2.7	medium
2.8-4.0	high

### 3.1. What is the level of self-esteem among Yemeni Undergraduate EFL students?

The first step to measure the level of self-esteem among the Yemeni EFL students is to compute the mean of self-esteem scores as a whole as summarized in table 2 below. As it can be seen in table (2), the mean score of self-esteem among Yemeni EFL students is (119.78). Dividing the mean (119.78) by the total number of the items (41), we get (2.90) which ranges high on the likert-type scale (1-4). The 4-point scale was deemed appropriate for use in the questionnaire based on the ranking scale in the present study.

Table 2. displays the mean scores of Self-esteem Scale				
	N	Items No.	Mean	Std. Deviation
Total of self-esteem	50	41	119.78	12.85

scores				
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The percentage is 73 (by dividing 2.90 by 4 and multiplied by 100) which means that the Yemeni EFL students show high self-esteem.

The second step to measure the level of self-esteem of Yemeni EFL students is to know the mean scores of the two dimensions of self-esteem; (a) self-perception b) other's perception of oneself.

Table 3. illustrates the mean scores of ' Self-perception'				
	N	Items No.	Mean	Std. Deviation
Self-perception	50	22	63.12	7.91

In table (3) the mean scores of self-perception of Yemeni EFL students is (63.12) & SD is (7.91). When dividing the (63.12) by the total number of the items (22), the result is 2.87. In the 4-likert scale (2.87) means that self-perception of Yemeni of EFL students' is high. Percentage is (72%) (by dividing the mean score (2.87) by 4 and multiply it by 100).

Table 4. reveals the mean scores of 'Others' perception of oneself				
	N	Items No.	Mean	Std. Deviation
Other's perception of oneself	50	19	56.66	6.47

In table (4) the mean score of others'-perception of oneself of Yemeni EFL students is (56.66) and SD is (6.47). When dividing the (56.66) by the total number of the items (19), the result is 2.98. According to the 4-likert scale, (2.98) means high. Percentage equals (75%) (by dividing the mean score 2.87 by 4 and multiply it by 100).It means that the others' perception of oneself Yemeni of EFL students' is high.

Results show that EFL Yemeni students generally have a high level of self-esteem. Their overall mean scores in both subscales (self-perception & others' perception of oneself) are high as revealed in figure (1) below. Such a result can be taken as an advantage to raise the students' self-esteem and encourage them to enhance their self-worth which affects their academic success and other social life matters.

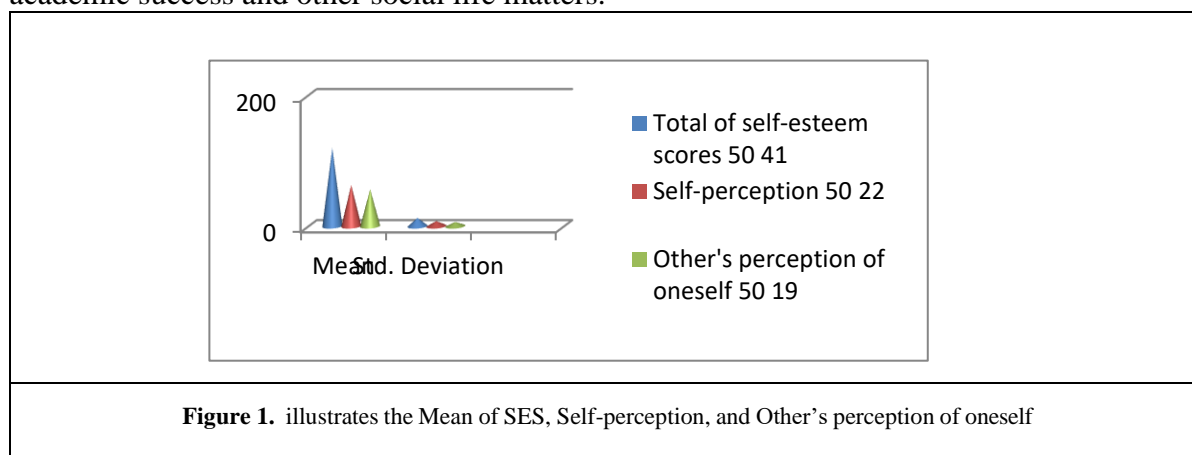


Figure 1. illustrates the Mean of SES, Self-perception, and Other's perception of oneself

### 3.2. Is there any significant difference in Yemeni males' and females' self-esteem mean scores?

First, it is worth to indicate that this question deals with the relationship between gender and overall self-esteem and its dimensions.

Table 5. Mean Comparison of both male and female scores in the Self-esteem Scale				
Total of self-esteem test	Gender	N	Mean	Sig.
	Female	38	25.03	
	male	12	27.00	

Looking carefully at table (5), it can be said that there are very slight differences between the self-esteem among Yemeni males and females. The mean score of females is (25.03) and males is (27) which indicates that male students show a bit higher level of self-esteem than females but not significant. The two genders show no statistical significance at the level 0.05 in self-esteem test (figure 2). Since results in the 1<sup>st</sup> question indicate that Yemeni EFL students have high self-esteem, and then it can be concluded that Yemeni female and male learners of English foreign language at university level show the same level of self-esteem which is high.

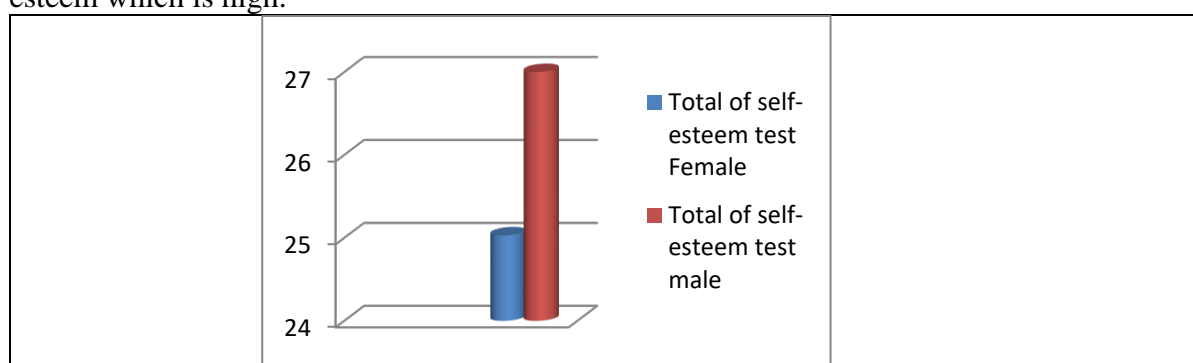


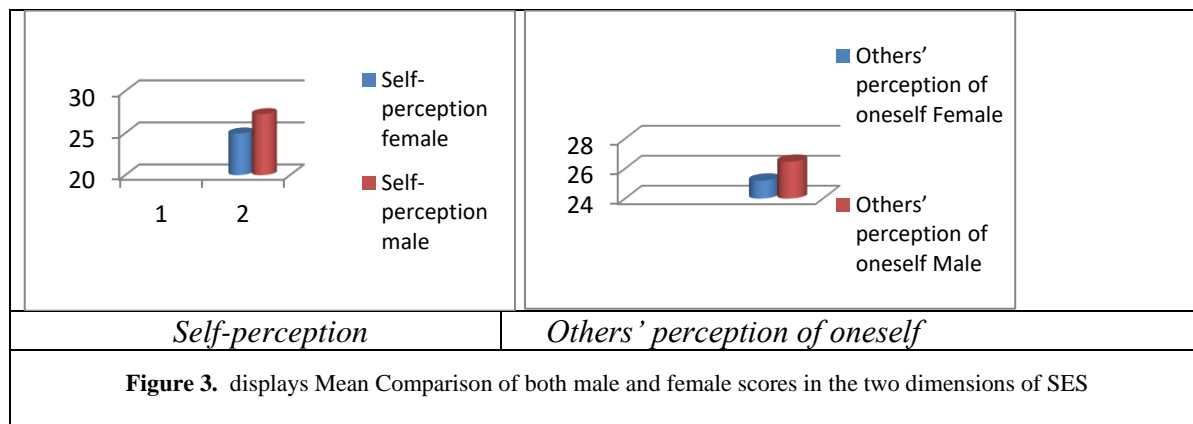
Figure 2. illustrates the Mean of both female and male scores in SES

As long as self-esteem has two major dimensions “self-perception” and “Others’ perception of oneself”, it is essential to compute the mean score of both male and female scores in the two dimensions as well.

Table 6. Mean Comparison of both male and female scores in the two dimensions of SES				
	gender	N	Mean	Sig.
Self-perception	female	38	24.95	.633
	male	12	27.25	
Others’ perception of oneself	Female	38	25.20	.793
	Male	12	26.46	

As shown in table (6), mean scores of females equals 24.95 and male 27.25 in their self-perception and significance value is only .63. This indicates that female and male students exhibit approximately same degree in their self-perception as the value is not significant. Regarding the 2<sup>nd</sup> dimension ‘Others’ perception of oneself’, the mean of female is 25.20 and male is 26.46 and the value of significance is only .79 which means that there is no significant difference among female and male students with respect to the 2<sup>nd</sup> dimension in the scale “Others’ perception towards them”. It can be concluded that there is no significant difference among Yemeni male and female learners of English with respect to their self-esteem including their self-perception and others’ perception towards themselves as illustrated in figure (3).





These results can be explained that students enjoy good thoughts and feelings, positive attitudes towards the self and others' perception towards them. They also have positive perception of others' towards oneself. They feel superior to others and like to learn a foreign language to some degree among their classmates and friends even if they have make any mistakes, they go around the circle of positive self-esteem.

### 3.3. What is the level of oral performance of Yemeni undergraduate EFL students'?

**Table 7.** shows the mean scores of Oral Test

	N	Items No.	Mean	Std. Deviation
Oral Test	50	20	9.94	2.419

Findings in table (7) demonstrate that the mean scores of spoken test (9.94), and Std. Deviation (2.419). When dividing the mean scores by the total score of the spoken test 20, the result will be (49.7%). This percentage confirms that the Yemeni EFL learners' performance in oral skill is low.

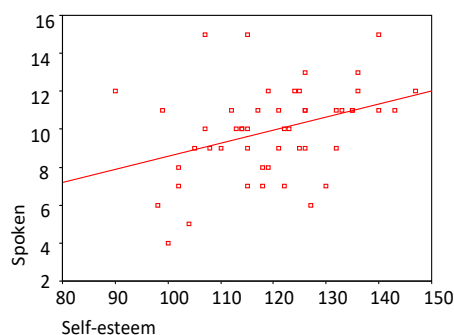
### 3.4. Is there any relationship between overall self-esteem of Yemeni undergraduate EFL learners' and their English oral performance?

**Table 8.** Pearson correlation between self-esteem scores and English Oral test score

English Oral test	Pearson Correlation with self-esteem	Sig. (2-tailed)
	.365**	.009
	27.00	

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

In table (8), Pearson correlation between the self-esteem scores ( $r=.365$ ,  $p=.009 < 0.01$ ) which indicates that there is a statistically significant and positive relationship between the Yemeni EFL students' self-esteem and their English oral performance at the level of significance. This reflects that the more high self-esteem the students have the more fluent speakers they are as illustrated in figure (4) below.



**Figure 4.** shows Pearson correlation between Self-esteem score and English oral test score

It was essential to assess if there is any difference between the two dimensions of self-esteem scores of Yemeni undergraduate EFL learners' and their spoken performance scores?

<b>Table 9.</b> Pearson correlation between the two dimensions of Self-esteem scores and spoken test score		
Pearson Correlation between Spoken test and self-perception	r	Sig. (2.tailed)
	.427**	.002
Pearson Correlation between Spoken test and Others' Perception of oneself	.202	.160

Looking closely at the findings in table (9), it can be noticed that there is a statistical correlation between students' self-perception scores and their spoken proficiency scores, where the correlation coefficient ( $r = .427$ ,  $p = .002 > 0.01$ ), which means it is significant at the level 0.01. Referring to the second dimension of SES, it is shown in table (9) that there is no statistical correlation between the scores of (others' perception of oneself) scores of the students and their spoken performance scores. The correlation coefficient is very low, ( $r$  is .20) and (sig. is .16). It can be inferred that there is no significant relationship between (others' perception of oneself) of the Yemeni EFL learners' and their spoken proficiency, so there is probably no effect of the second dimension of SES on the students' spoken proficiency.

#### 4. Discussion

In this study, an attempt is made to examine the existence or not of any relationship between self-esteem and oral performance of the Yemeni undergraduate EFL learners. Before that, the study tries to investigate the degree of self-esteem among the Yemeni undergraduate EFL learners in relation to gender as well as it tries to explore their level in English speaking skill. In the first question '*What is the level of self-esteem among the Yemeni Undergraduate EFL students?*', the results of the current study show that the Yemeni EFL students have high self-esteem including the two subcomponents of self-esteem (they show high self-perception towards themselves, besides high perception of others to themselves). The findings regarding this question in this study are in line with the findings of other studies conducted in different contexts (Abdul-khalek et al, 2012; Hannas and Kaymakamoglu, 2017; Terblanche et al, 2021). Abdul-khalek et al (2012) conducted a study on a group of Arab college students. It was found that Kuwaiti and Omani men had a significantly higher mean score on self-esteem than Egyptian and Lebanese men did; while Egyptian women

scored significantly lower than the Omani women with a slight difference. In a study conducted in Turkey, Hannas and Kaymakamoglu (2017) found that there are no significant differences between the EFL students' perceptions about their self-esteem in relation to gender, language level or age. It is also revealed that self-esteem influences student-student interaction, lecturer-student interaction, learning performance and academic performance (Terblanche et al, 2021). This finding is controversial with the result of an Arab Saudi study on EFL learners' self-esteem which revealed that Saudis are considered EFL learners with low self-esteem (Arabi, 2017).

Coming to the 2<sup>nd</sup> question of this study 'Are there any significant differences between Yemeni males' and females' self-esteem?', With reference to the findings of this study, it is indicated that no statistically significant differences are found between the scores of males and females in the self-esteem scale along with its two dimensions. This can be explained that Yemeni EFL learners share the same socio-cultural and educational background, being taught the same English syllabus and received the same conventional teaching approaches and materials. The findings in this study are in line with another two studies conducted in Arab countries (Abdul-khalek, Korayem & El-Nayal, 2012; Al-rabai, 2017). Abdul-khalek et al (2012) concluded in their study that there were no significant differences in mean scores of self-esteem in relation to gender of college students except with Kuwaiti males who had a higher mean score than Kuwaiti females but not significant. Likewise, Al-rabai (2017) studied the gender variable impact on Saudi EFL learners and found that gender is not a significant to influence the participants' self-esteem in learning English as a foreign language. However, the findings of other studies on gender and self-esteem in language learning contexts are controversial (Brown, 2007; D'Mello, Monteiro, & Pinto, 2018). Brown (2007) reported that female students were found to be more motivated by self-esteem enhancement than male students. D'Mello et al (2018) stated that a difference might be existed as female respondents have more self-esteem than male respondents; however, it is not statistically significant. Other studies on language learning related to gender have shown inconsistent findings (Chaves, 2001; Flynn, 2003; Phakiti, 2003; Al-Sanahani, 2007). Chavez (2001) found that females scored higher than males in a multiple-choice reading test contrary to the fact that boys were found to be superior to females on a listening vocabulary recognition test. Flynn (2003) argued, in a case study, applied in the U.S.A that boys were raised oriented toward individualism and girls were raised oriented toward collective orientation shedding additional light on the findings that girls consistently had lower self-esteem than boys. Phakiti (2003) reported that there are no significant differences due to gender in using cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies in reading comprehension test. Al-Sanahani (2007) pointed out in her study that the effectiveness of instruction in developing EFL learners' pragmatic competence was not affected by the gender of the learners, where both males and females benefit equally from instruction in developing their Pragmatic Competence.

And regarding the question which stated '*What is the level of oral test among the Yemeni Undergraduate EFL students*', findings of this study indicate that Yemeni EFL learners at university level are less fluent in speaking skill. Literature on Arab difficulties in learning English as a foreign language pointed to the poor speaking progress of EFL learners in English oral performance and found out some of the causes behind that (Abu Alyan, 2013; Cheekeong et al, 2014; Al-Saqri, 2014; Al-hassanni & Al-saalmi, 2019; Kashmiri, 2019; Huwari, 2019; Abed & Alishah, 2022). A study conducted on Arab EFL learners in Gaza by interviewing 20 English major students and 6 English teachers to figure out the difficulties EFL learners encounter in oral communication in English. It is found that students' lack of exposure to target language, interference of mother tongue, poor habit in developing extensive listening and reading, limited vocabulary, inability to speak one's minds and lack of confidence are some of the causes of the problem (Abu Alyan, 2013). In a study conducted

on Yemeni EFL high school students in Malaysia, Cheekeong et al (2014) categorized the difficulties of the students in oral communication into 3 factors; teachers focus on grammatical aspect not speaking, curriculum is not designed to enhance oral communication skills; and lack of confidence with the students while speaking. Al-Saqri (2014) conducted a study in Saudi EFL learners at secondary school and found that EFL learners encounter oral communication deficiencies due to shortage of time to practice oral activities, no regular oral testing which can push students to practice speaking; and difficulty in building a correct sentence in English which is unlike a sentence structure in Arabic. He added that EFL Saudi learners exhibit poor performance in speaking sub-skills for instance; pronunciation, grammar, fluency and vocabulary due to lack of confidence, limited time teaching the curriculum and practical use of language (Al-Saqri, 2014). In addition to shortage of vocabulary and switching to mother tongue, Al-hassanni & Al-saalmi (2019) found that lack of time to practice English, variation of syllabus & teaching materials with EFL Saudi students' daily life needs as well as labor market requirements and lack of motivation to speak, all play essential role in weakening the students' English oral communication skills. Kashmiri (2019) argued that EFL students avoid communication in English due to inhibition and lack of motivation, fear of being criticized when committing mistakes, no sufficient speaking exercises in their textbooks, and lack of attractive learning environment. Huwari (2019) and Abed & Alishah (2022) examined the problems' of Jordanian Arab EFL learners' in speaking skill. They figured out that lack of oral participation in English classroom due to large classes or shortage of time, students' shyness, poor or limited vocabulary knowledge, fruitless group working, and the traditional teaching methods in the classroom all contribute in students' poor performance in speaking.

The third question stated '*Is there a relationship between the Yemeni EFL students' oral performance and their self-esteem?*' is to check whether there is any correlation between the two variables (self-esteem and spoken performance). Results of this study indicate that there is a highly positive significant relationship between the students' spoken skill score and their self-esteem score, particularly their 'self-perception'. This can be interpreted that by raising learners' self-esteem, particularly their self-perception, while learning a foreign language, their oral performance be will enhanced as well. Yemeni EFL self-esteem is already assessed to be high when they responded easily to the Arabic version of self-esteem scale. Yemeni EFL students could be facing difficulties in oral communication in a foreign language, but their high self-esteem can assist them to overcome the obstacles they encounter in their language learning journey. Generally, students show high self-esteem in different aspects of life, but it happens to learn English in a late stage. This means self-esteem of EFL students should be enhanced in order to encourage them to go over well in English oral practice. If they perceive that they can achieve well in their language production, their self-esteem will go higher. In other words, it can be concluded that the Yemeni EFL learners' self-perception is correlated positively with their spoken performance with high significance. Since speaking is an active skill which demands students to interact and comprehend what is said to them, students' self-perception can affect their feelings while they are speaking. Therefore, this relationship can be reciprocal as well.

Literature related to the relationship between students' self-esteem and EFL oral production is existed (Heyde, 1979; Koosha et al, 2011; Ahor & Hassanzadi, 2015; Al-rabai & Moskovesky, 2016; Navita, 2016; Zehra et al, 2019; Bahat & Bahadur, 2020). Heyde (1979) studied the effects of 3 levels of self-esteem (global, specific and task) on performance of an oral production task by American college students learning French as a

foreign language. Heyde found that all three levels of self-esteem correlated positively with performance in oral production particularly self-esteem with regard to the particular language learning spoken task. Koosha et al (2011) showed in their study that all sub-skills of oral skill are affected by self-esteem but not statistically significant except fluency sub-skill which was found to be highly affected by self-esteem. Findings in Ahor's & Hassanzadi's study (2015) revealed that there was a statistically significant relationship between Iranian intermediate EFL learners' self-esteem, their use of indirect strategies, and oral language proficiency. Al-rabai & Moskovesky (2016) investigated the impact of five affective variables on English language achievement of Saudi EFL learners. The findings show that self-esteem, one of the affective variables, found to make a unique contribution to L2 performance. Likewise, Navita (2016) examined if there is any correlation between self-esteem and English speaking skills and finds out that students with high self-esteem are enthusiastic to speak, and those who low self-esteem feel demotivated and inhibited to speak; as a result they often lose marks when it comes to their academic level in speaking. Zahra et al (2019) studied if there is any connection between the students' self-esteem and their speaking skill. Results indicated that students show an average level of self-esteem which is influenced by speaking aspects. Bahat & Bahadur argued that self esteem and self efficacy are strongly positively correlated which leads to a better academic performance (2020).

#### **4.1. Recommendations:**

The results of the study recommend that learners' self-esteem should be raised by all stakeholders beginning by parents at home, teachers and instructors at schools as well as curriculum designers and policy makers. Thus, awareness is the keynote solution for raising self-esteem of learners to enhance their academic progress and vice versa. Teachers' awareness regarding this issue should be established as a first step. It is suggested the teachers should provide learners with opportunities to express their feelings and ideas. It is urgent to focus on the multiplicity of individual learning process which should be recognized to meet students' needs and create for them areas where their success can be guaranteed. Teachers should provide students with tasks and activities which encourage them to appreciate other people's feelings, values and attainments. In addition, they should praise students who participate in dialogues and oral activities. It is essential to engage students in English conversations about their interests and abilities. Teachers should pay more attention to those students with low self-esteem in order to build positive self-esteem in them and allow them to work within a team. Instructors can use trust-building activities and cooperative learning techniques in oral classes, as well as focusing on students' oral accomplishments and avoiding letdowns which can lessen or destroy learners' self-esteem. Moreover, it is also recommended to observe students with low self-esteem in spoken English classes. Teachers should schedule lessons so that students have enough time to practice and use language openly on different language aspects such as; pronunciation, phonetics, dialogues and intonation. Conversation practice in English language with the classmates and

teachers is expected to improve the speaking skills among the students and also enhance the level of motivation and self-esteem. Creative thinking among students should be motivated in which they can engage with a variety of texts, explore different points of view, create content and respond to information. Most importantly that should be followed by the teachers is to guarantee that learners do not, at any circumstances, experience putdowns, labeling, criticism, unfair comparisons, harsh words or sarcasm in learning contexts which can create inferiority complex or a feeling of inadequacy inside them. Teachers have to increase praise, encouragement, affection

towards the students in order to strengthen their self-esteem which will accordingly affect on their academic performance. For curriculum designers and syllabi planners of English, it is crucial to include different activities and exercises within their goals and objectives. Tasks should be designed to develop the interest of students towards reading and listening skills. A variety of tasks can push students to speak with a good sense of self-esteem of oneself; for instance, videos, documentaries, commentary and movies that can develop fluency and accuracy. Oral activities being used in language textbooks and teachers in schools, universities and language institutes should be analyzed and evaluated.

#### **4.2. Limitations of the Study:**

Due to the aim of the current study and the sample size, some limitations of the study are to be recognized and some suggestions for future research will be, in view of that, proposed. Since this study is limited to investigate the relationship between self-esteem and English spoken performance, researches are encouraged to explore other educational aspects in relation to other English language skills, where new findings related to the field may be found and consequently could upgrade the students' level in English language learning. It is also recommended to study self-esteem with other affective factors, like anxiety, inhibition and risk-taking in relation to second or foreign language learning and acquisition. Another limitation is that participants of this study are only university students who were selected from one area in Yemen which could be regarded as a minor part of the whole population of EFL learners in the Republic of Yemen, so it is recommended that research should be replicated in other areas in the country for generalization purposes. A considerable limitation of this study is the lack of triangulation of instruments of more than one data collection method in collecting the data using a variety of tools such as interviews and observations. Future research could attempt to evaluate spoken activities in language textbooks as well as observed oral tasks used by teachers in schools, universities and language institutes, which may help raising students' self-esteem in order to enhance students' oral communication in English. Another investigation of self-perception with gender in relation to age in foreign language learning contexts needs to be conducted. A further research is also recommended to be replicated with different population and different instructional treatments from different perspectives.

#### **5. Conclusion**

This paper has examined the level of self-esteem among Yemeni EFL learners in relation to gender as well as their English oral performance at tertiary level. The paper also attempts to scrutinize whether there is any relationship between learners' self-esteem and their speaking performance. The findings reveal that Yemeni EFL learners have positive self-esteem including the two subcomponents. Yemeni EFL learners show high self-perception towards themselves, besides high perception of others to themselves. No statistical significant differences were found between females and males regarding their self-esteem including the two dimensions. However, results show that students' self-esteem significantly and positively correlated with their marks in spoken skill's test. Parents, teachers, educationists, curriculum designers are recommended to work together towards enhancing students' self-esteem in foreign language learning contexts primarily by providing trust-building activities and cooperative learning techniques in English textbooks and

spoken classes. Teachers need to exert more efforts to increase the students' self-esteem in EFL contexts. Curriculum in schools and universities should provide students with activities which help in promoting their self-esteem in spoken classes.

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Table 10. Self-Esteem Scale

No	Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly
1	I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.				
2	I will never be as capable as I should be.				
3	I take a positive attitude toward myself.				
4	I find it difficult to hear criticism about myself.				
5	On the whole, I am satisfied with myself and with anything I do.				
6	I think I'm not good at all.				
7	I feel that I have a number of good qualities which make me proud of myself.				
8	I feel it unfair because I don't get what I deserve.				
9	How I feel about myself is more important than other's opinion of me.				
10	I tend to think negatively much of the time.				
11	I am able to do things very well.				
12	I'm not pleased with my personal appearance.				
13	I have what it takes to socialize with other people.				
14	I tend to let fear and anxiety control many of my decisions.				
15	I'm sure I'm going to achieve what I want in future.				
16	I dislike myself when I think of my weaknesses.				
17	I feel my abilities and intelligence are high.				
18	I tend to magnify my mistakes and minimize my successes.				
19	It's not easy to defeat me in discussion.				
20	I feel I can't do anything at all.				
21	I often make mistakes.				





