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Digital Media in Language Learning: EFL Students' Perceptions of YouTube's Effect on Speaking Proficiency

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Abstract: This study investigates English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students' perceptions of YouTube's effect as a digital tool on speaking skills, with particular attention to the influence of gender and educational level. The primary objectives are to examine differences in perceptions between male and female students and across varying academic levels within the English Department at Seiyun University. A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques. A questionnaire was administered to 53 students, while semi-structured interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of eight students (four male and four female) representing different educational levels. Descriptive statistics, independent samples *t*-tests, and one-way ANOVA were utilized to analyze the quantitative data and assess the significance of differences in perception based on gender and academic level. Findings indicate that male students generally reported more favorable perceptions of YouTube's effect on speaking skills than their female counterparts. Moreover, students at the fourth academic level demonstrated stronger beliefs in the platform's efficacy in enhancing their speaking proficiency compared to those in lower levels. These results underscore the importance of considering demographic and educational variables when integrating digital media tools like YouTube into language learning curricula. The study recommends that language educators and curriculum designers adopt differentiated strategies to optimize the use of YouTube in speaking skill development, tailoring approaches based on learners' gender and academic standing.

Keywords: Digital Media; Educational Level; English as a Foreign Language (EFL); Gender Differences; Speaking Proficiency; Student Perceptions; YouTube

1. Introduction

In the last twenty years, YouTube has grown from a simple video-sharing website into one of the most widely used digital platforms, offering content that ranges from entertainment to education. One of its main advantages, compared with other social media sites like Instagram, Facebook, or TikTok, is that videos remain available for repeated viewing. This makes YouTube particularly attractive for learners who want to review materials, study at their own pace, and return to useful content whenever needed.

For students of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), YouTube has become more than just a source of entertainment. It provides access to authentic spoken English through a wide variety of materials such as interviews, vlogs, lectures, and short films. Exposure to these resources gives learners opportunities to hear natural conversation, dif-

ferent accents, and diverse styles of communication. Recent research has shown that using YouTube in language classrooms can strengthen speaking skills, leading to better fluency, pronunciation, and vocabulary use [1–3]. At the same time, the platform encourages students to become more motivated, more confident, and more independent in their learning [4,5].

Another strength of YouTube is that it supports both classroom learning and self-study. Teachers often use it to supplement lessons and make activities more interactive, while students use it outside class to practice on their own and explore topics of personal interest [6,7]. Features such as subtitles, playback speed, and interactive comments also allow learners to engage more actively with content, which can deepen their understanding and give them more control over their learning experience.

Altogether, these qualities highlight why YouTube is now seen as a valuable tool for improving speaking skills in EFL contexts. As digital media continues to reshape the way education is delivered, it is important to understand how students themselves perceive YouTube's role in developing their speaking ability, since their experiences can inform how teachers and institutions integrate such tools into language learning.

1.1. Theoretical Background

In recent years, the integration of digital technology into language learning has significantly changed how students develop English skills, especially speaking. Among the approaches that have guided this shift are Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) and Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL). MALL focuses on using mobile devices such as smartphones and tablets, allowing learners to practice anytime and anywhere. Studies show that MALL is particularly useful for building vocabulary and fostering motivation, as it encourages learners to take ownership of their learning [8,9]. However, while flexible, MALL tends to focus more on vocabulary and listening rather than providing a full framework for developing speaking proficiency.

CALL, by contrast, offers a broader approach. It incorporates computers, multimedia platforms, and interactive programs to support all four language skills. CALL environments give learners access to authentic input, including videos, lectures, and interactive exercises, and allow them to practice at their own pace. Research has demonstrated that CALL can improve fluency and pronunciation, providing learners with repeated exposure to natural speech [10,11]. While MALL excels in flexibility, CALL provides richer, more comprehensive content, making it particularly well-suited for integrating platforms like YouTube into language learning. For this reason, CALL serves as the theoretical foundation of the present study.

YouTube has emerged as one of the most effective digital tools within this framework. It offers authentic, real-world language input through interviews, vlogs, tutorials, and lectures, helping learners to hear natural pronunciation, intonation, and conversational patterns [12,13]. This exposure is crucial for improving speaking skills because it allows learners to observe and imitate how English is actually used. YouTube also motivates students by offering a wide range of topics, from cooking shows and travel videos to educational channels, which encourages them to engage with language in ways that feel meaningful and enjoyable [14]. Its interactive features—subtitles, replay options, and comment sections—further support comprehension and enable learners to practice and refine their pronunciation and fluency at their own pace [15].

Another key advantage of YouTube is that it promotes self-directed learning. Learners can choose when, how often, and in what way they interact with content, allowing them to revisit challenging material or explore topics of personal interest. This autonomy has been linked to greater persistence and sustained skill development [16]. Additionally, studies in neuroscience suggest that video-based learning engages multiple brain regions, improving memory, comprehension, and the ability to imitate natural speech patterns [17].

Speaking itself is a complex skill that requires the integration of vocabulary, grammar, fluency, pronunciation, and comprehension [18,19]. YouTube supports each of these elements. Learners acquire vocabulary in context, which helps with retention [20], while grammar is reinforced through explanatory videos and examples in real-life situations [21]. Fluency improves through repeated exposure to natural speech across different contexts [22], and pronunciation benefits from the opportunity to imitate native speakers with the ability to pause, replay, and practice [23]. Comprehension is strengthened as learners interpret meaning not only from words but also from tone, gestures, and cultural cues embedded in authentic videos [24]. Thus, in this study, speaking skills refer to the learners' ability to effectively communicate in spoken English, particularly as a foreign language, encompassing fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, and vocabulary use.

Taken together, these factors show that YouTube, when used within a CALL framework, offers learners a unique combination of authenticity, interactivity, and autonomy. It provides real opportunities to practice speaking in meaningful contexts, making it a powerful tool for improving EFL learners' communication skills. This combination of features forms the foundation for investigating students' perceptions of YouTube's impact on their speaking proficiency.

1.2. Previous Studies

Research on the use of YouTube in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning has grown rapidly in recent years, with studies exploring its impact on speaking skills, vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency, motivation, and learner autonomy. Broadly, these studies demonstrate that YouTube, as a multimedia platform, offers authentic, interactive, and engaging input that supports language development across multiple dimensions.

1.2.1. YouTube and Grammar

Several studies have highlighted the role of YouTube in enhancing grammatical knowledge. Videos that provide contextualized explanations, real-life dialogues, and interactive tutorials help learners understand grammar rules in a more natural and engaging way. Exposure to correct grammatical structures through repeated, authentic input supports retention and practical application. Quasi-experimental research shows significant improvements in learners' grammar performance when YouTube is integrated into instruction [25]. However, some researchers caution that without teacher guidance, learners may face distractions or misinterpret content, emphasizing the importance of carefully curated material [26,27]. While these studies primarily focus on grammar, the current study extends this exploration to broader speaking skills, including fluency, pronunciation, and communicative competence.

1.2.2. Vocabulary Development

YouTube has been recognized as an effective tool for vocabulary acquisition. Videos that situate new words within meaningful, real-life contexts, often with subtitles, facilitate both recognition and productive use [28, 29]. Learners benefit from repeated exposure, the ability to pause and replay content, and the visual-auditory integration that strengthens retention. Thematic content, such as cooking shows or educational lectures, enhances motivation by allowing learners to engage with personally relevant topics. Unlike prior studies that primarily measured vocabulary gains quantitatively, our research examines learners' perceptions of how YouTube influences vocabulary use within broader speaking performance [30–32].

1.2.3. Pronunciation Improvement

Pronunciation is a critical component of speaking skills, and YouTube provides authentic models of native speech that learners can imitate [33–35]. Repeated exposure to natural intonation, stress, rhythm, and accent variation improves accuracy and prosody. Features such as subtitles, slow-motion, and replay support learners' ability to notice and correct errors independently. While previous studies largely employ structured pronunciation exercises or experimental designs, our study investigates learners' subjective experiences with pronunciation improvement through self-directed engagement with YouTube content.

1.2.4. Fluency and Speaking Performance

YouTube also contributes to fluency and overall speaking performance by offering authentic, spontaneous language input. Watching conversational videos, vlogs, interviews, and debates allows learners to observe natural speech patterns, organize their ideas, and produce language more confidently [36–40]. Repeated practice in a self-paced, low-pressure environment reduces speaking anxiety and fosters confidence. While previous studies often focus on quantitative measures of fluency such as speech rate or pauses, our research emphasizes learners' perceptions of fluency development, exploring their sense of preparedness, spontaneity, and communicative confidence.

1.2.5. Learner Perceptions and Motivation

Students generally hold positive attitudes toward using YouTube for language learning, appreciating its flexibility, accessibility, and engaging multimedia features [41–45]. Studies indicate that learners' motivation and self-

directed learning increase when they can choose content aligned with their interests. However, concerns remain regarding content quality and the need for teacher guidance to ensure educational relevance. Our study aligns with these findings by investigating students' perceptions while expanding the scope to include psychological and linguistic aspects of speaking development.

1.2.6. Research Gaps and Rationale

Despite substantial evidence that YouTube supports various aspects of language learning, most studies have examined isolated skills such as grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, or fluency in experimental settings. Few studies explore the holistic effect of YouTube on learners' speaking skills, particularly from the perspective of students' own experiences and attitudes. Moreover, research in EFL contexts such as Yemeni universities remains scarce. Many prior investigations focus on objective outcomes measured through pre-tests and post-tests, overlooking psychological and motivational dimensions, which are critical for effective language acquisition [46].

This study addresses these gaps by examining learners' perceptions of YouTube's role in improving speaking proficiency. By adopting a qualitative approach, it captures how students perceive enhancements in fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary use, and overall communicative confidence. Additionally, it explores how self-directed engagement with YouTube content affects motivation, autonomy, and willingness to participate in speaking activities. Understanding these learner-centered factors provides insights into the practical integration of digital media in EFL teaching and helps design more effective and contextually appropriate language programs [47,48].

By focusing on students' subjective experiences, the study complements previous quantitative research, offering a richer understanding of how YouTube functions as an authentic, flexible, and interactive learning tool. This comprehensive approach not only evaluates linguistic outcomes but also sheds light on learners' confidence, engagement, and strategies for self-improvement, providing a well-rounded perspective on technology-enhanced language learning.

1.3. Learning the English Language in Yemen

English language education in Yemen has a rich history marked by both achievements and challenges. Its introduction into Yemeni schools significantly shaped the academic landscape. Research indicates that English was first introduced in South Yemen by the British in the early 19th century [49]. Over the years, Yemeni families have increasingly recognized the importance of English in science, technology, and business, leading to greater emphasis on language proficiency [50].

Despite these achievements, English teaching in Yemen still faces challenges. Traditional methods often prioritize reading and writing over speaking, limiting students' opportunities for meaningful oral communication [51]. As a result, learners frequently struggle to express their thoughts clearly and confidently in English, which impacts their overall communicative competence [52].

1.4. Statement of the Problem

This study examines EFL students' perceptions of the impact of YouTube on their speaking skills. Although English is a global language, many learners continue to struggle with fluency and pronunciation [53–55]. Shyness, nervousness, and fear of making mistakes often prevent students from speaking confidently in class [56]. Traditional classrooms that focus heavily on grammar instruction rather than oral communication further exacerbate these difficulties [57].

In today's digital era, learners have access to innovative tools like YouTube, which offer authentic, interactive, and engaging content for self-directed learning [58,59]. Previous studies highlight YouTube's potential in improving vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency, and learner motivation [60–62]. However, research in the Yemeni context remains limited, particularly regarding the students' own perceptions and experiences with YouTube as a tool to enhance speaking skills [63].

This study addresses this gap by exploring whether YouTube can be an effective platform for improving Yemeni EFL students' speaking proficiency and by capturing their subjective experiences and attitudes toward this learning approach.

1.5. Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of this study are:

1. To explore Yemeni EFL students' perceptions of the effect of using YouTube on their speaking skills according to gender (male and female).
2. To explore Yemeni EFL students' perceptions of the effect of using YouTube on their speaking skills according to educational level.

1.6. Questions of the Study

This study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What are Yemeni EFL students' perceptions of the effect of using YouTube on their speaking skills according to gender (male and female)?
2. What are Yemeni EFL students' perceptions of the effect of using YouTube on their speaking skills according to educational level?

1.7. Significance of the Study

This study investigates how YouTube can contribute to the development of university students' speaking skills. As one of the most widely used social media platforms, YouTube offers diverse, engaging, and authentic content that supports language learning [64]. Learners can interact with videos, pause, replay, and imitate native speakers, creating opportunities for self-directed improvement [65].

The study also addresses a gap in Yemeni research, where little is known about the impact of YouTube on speaking skills, particularly from learners' own perspectives [66]. Insights from this study will help educators integrate digital tools effectively into English language instruction, improve student engagement, and enhance communicative competence [67,68].

2. Methodology

2.1. Design of the Study

This study adopts a descriptive research design to explore students' perceptions of YouTube as a digital learning tool. Descriptive studies are crucial in identifying patterns and trends that can guide future research [69]. This design was chosen for its ability to combine both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis, providing a holistic understanding of the research problem. Integrating qualitative and quantitative methods allows for richer data and more robust conclusions [70].

The quantitative component involved structured questionnaires with closed-ended questions, enabling the collection of numerical data for statistical analysis to identify patterns and trends in students' perceptions and their use of YouTube in language learning. The qualitative component consisted of semi-structured interviews, providing rich and detailed insights into students' experiences, opinions, and perceptions. Using both closed-ended questions and interviews ensures a comprehensive exploration of the topic, allowing triangulation of data to enhance the validity and reliability of results [71].

2.2. Sample of the Study

The sample consisted of students from various English proficiency levels in the Department of English at the Faculty of Arts and Languages, Seiyun University. To ensure representativeness, students from different academic years and proficiency levels were included to capture a wide range of perspectives.

A stratified random sampling method was adopted in this study. Stratified random sampling is a technique used to ensure adequate representation of various subgroups within the population. In this case, the population consists of EFL students from different academic levels and demographic backgrounds [72,73]. The sample was selected randomly with a 30% ratio from each academic level. A total of 53 students from different academic levels at the Faculty of Arts and Languages and the College of Girls participated in the study. The distribution of the sample was as follows: 14 students from the first level, 13 from the second, 13 from the third, and 13 from the fourth level. Based on the original number of students at each level, the percentages were: 45 students in level one, 42 in level

two, 42 in level three, and 39 in level four. Additionally, eight students were selected purposively for semi-structured interviews to provide deeper insights into their perceptions and experiences.

This sample is well-representative of students across different specializations, ensuring that the study results will be comprehensive and reflect students' opinions across educational levels. The sample size was determined based on the need for statistical power and the ability to conduct in-depth qualitative analysis.

2.3. Research Instruments

Two primary instruments were employed: questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Questionnaires are efficient for collecting quantitative data, allowing researchers to gather substantial information quickly and at low cost [74]. The structured questionnaire in this study captured demographic information, patterns of YouTube use, and perceptions of its effectiveness in improving speaking and pronunciation skills using a Likert scale.

The questionnaire used in this study was developed based on a review of relevant literature on the use of YouTube and multimedia resources in EFL learning. The instrument consisted of 21 Likert-scale items (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) designed to measure students' attitudes, beliefs, and opinions [75,76] of YouTube's effect on various aspects of English speaking skills, including pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, fluency, and listening comprehension.

To ensure content validity, the questionnaire was developed by a group of specialized professors of the departments of English language at the College of Arts and Languages and the College of Girls, Seiyun University. This external review helped improve the quality of the research and ensured that the adopted methodology was appropriate and accurate. Priority was given to feedback from these academics to ensure that all procedures and findings align with academic research standards. Additionally, a pilot study was conducted with 15 EFL students, and minor revisions were made accordingly. The internal consistency of the instrument was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. The results indicated high reliability, with an overall alpha coefficient of $\alpha \geq 0.78$.

Semi-structured interviews complemented the quantitative data, allowing participants to elaborate on their experiences with YouTube for language learning, highlighting challenges, benefits, and suggestions [77].

2.4. Statistical Methods

Data analysis combined descriptive and inferential statistics with qualitative analysis techniques. Descriptive statistics summarized questionnaire data through measures such as mean, standard deviation, and frequency distributions, while cross-tabulation compared responses across demographic groups [78].

The qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis, including transcription, coding, and theme development to identify main patterns and themes [79]. The eight interviews were transcribed verbatim and examined through an iterative coding process. Initial open coding was conducted after repeated readings of the transcripts, and related codes were grouped into broader categories and refined into seven key themes. Trustworthiness was ensured through triangulation with quantitative data, maintaining an audit trail, and using representative interview excerpts. Inter-coder reliability was strengthened by having a second researcher independently code a subset of transcripts and resolving discrepancies through discussion.

t-tests were used to examine differences between two groups (male vs. female), while ANOVA tested differences among the four academic levels [80,81]. Mean and standard deviation provided insight into general trends and variability in responses [82].

2.5. Validation of the Instruments

Instrument credibility was ensured through review by specialized professors at the College of Arts and Languages and the College of Girls, Seiyun University. Feedback helped refine the methodology and ensured alignment with academic research standards [83].

3. Results

This study investigated students' perceptions of YouTube as a tool for improving English-speaking skills, focusing on gender and academic level differences. Data from 53 students were analyzed using descriptive statistics, independent-samples *t*-tests, one-way ANOVA, and thematic analysis. Results showed overall positive perceptions,

with differences across gender and academic levels.

Descriptive statistics (**Table 1**) showed that most questionnaire items scored above the neutral threshold of 3.0. The highest means were recorded for Q15 and Q21 (M = 3.94), reflecting strong agreement on YouTube's role in enhancing fluency and confidence. Similarly, Q9, Q20, Q18, and Q7 (M = 3.87–3.90) confirmed YouTube's contribution to vocabulary and pronunciation development. Conversely, Q1 (M = 3.01) received the lowest rating, possibly due to challenges such as content relevance or technical barriers.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics.

Question	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Question 1	53	3.0189	0.6352
Question 2	53	3.6792	1.10547
Question 3	53	3.8679	1.03845
Question 4	53	3.6981	1.2798
Question 5	53	3.5849	1.26238
Question 6	53	3.6226	1.30423
Question 7	53	3.8679	0.94131
Question 8	53	3.8302	1.08727
Question 9	53	3.9057	1.09657
Question 10	53	3.6792	1.17299
Question 11	53	3.6981	1.13654
Question 12	53	3.6415	1.2572
Question 13	53	3.434	1.06535
Question 14	53	3.6415	1.07586
Question 15	53	3.9434	1.04541
Question 16	53	3.5283	1.11982
Question 17	53	3.8113	1.07519
Question 18	53	3.8868	0.99345
Question 19	53	3.6604	1.22386
Question 20	53	3.9057	1.02402
Question 21	53	3.9434	1.11657

Table 1 summarizes the descriptive statistics of the 21 questionnaire items aimed at assessing students' perceptions of YouTube's impact on speaking skills. Each item was evaluated using the Likert scale, and the mean scores reflect the general level of agreement among participants. The results reveal a generally positive attitude toward the use of YouTube in enhancing speaking skills. Most items scored above the neutral threshold (3.0), indicating favorable perceptions. The highest mean scores were recorded for Questions 15 and 21 (3.9434), suggesting strong agreement that YouTube significantly aids in developing specific speaking aspects, possibly including fluency and confidence.

Similarly, Questions 9 (3.9057), 20 (3.9057), 18 (3.8868), and 7 (3.8679) also showed high means, indicating that YouTube content, particularly English conversations and movies, contributes to improvements in vocabulary acquisition, pronunciation, and fluency. Conversely, Question 1 recorded the lowest mean score (3.0189), which may reflect uncertainty or less favorable perceptions toward a particular aspect of YouTube usage (e.g., technical issues, lack of teacher support, or content relevance). Overall, the data suggest that students hold positive perceptions of YouTube's role in improving speaking skills, with high engagement particularly in fluency, motivation, and vocabulary development. However, the lower rating of some items highlights the need for pedagogical strategies to address specific weaknesses or challenges.

To answer the first research question, which aimed to investigate whether there are statistically significant differences between male and female students in their perceptions of YouTube's impact on their speaking skills, an Independent Samples *t*-test was employed. This test was chosen as it allows for comparison between the means of two independent groups, males and females, in order to determine whether any observed difference is statistically meaningful or due to random variation.

Table 2 presents the results of an independent sample *t*-test conducted to compare the perceptions of male and female students regarding the impact of YouTube on speaking skills. The test investigates whether the observed difference in means between genders is statistically significant or merely due to random variation. This analysis provides insight into whether gender plays a role in shaping students' attitudes toward using YouTube for language learning.

Table 2. Student's *t*-test for Independent Samples.

Gender	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Male	3.8800	25	0.55874
Female	3.5527	28	0.67919
Total	3.7071	53	0.64095

The results show that male students reported a higher mean (3.8800) than female students (3.5527) concerning the overall effect of YouTube on their speaking performance. The mean difference between the two groups is 0.3273, suggesting that males perceive a greater benefit from using YouTube in improving their speaking abilities.

While the *p*-value obtained (Sig. = 0.060) is slightly above the conventional threshold of 0.05, it is close enough to suggest a marginal trend toward significance. This implies that there might be a real difference in perception between male and female learners, even if it is not strong enough to be confirmed with high confidence statistically. The direction of this difference, however, supports the idea that male learners may engage more actively with YouTube content, or perhaps relate more positively to the learning style it promotes, such as visual, auditory, and interactive engagement.

Additionally, the standard deviation among female participants (0.67919) is higher than that of male participants (0.55874), suggesting greater variability in responses among females. This could mean that female learners have more diverse experiences with YouTube, possibly due to differing interests, confidence levels, or exposure.

Although it is not statistically significant at the 0.05 level, the results from **Table 2** indicate a clear tendency for male students to perceive YouTube as more effective in enhancing their speaking skills than female students. This gender-based variation in attitudes, while subtle, highlights the need for further qualitative investigation into how male and female learners interact differently with digital content.

To answer the second research question, which aimed to examine whether students' perceptions of YouTube's impact on speaking skills differ across academic levels, a One-Way ANOVA test was conducted. This statistical method is suitable for comparing the means of more than two independent groups, in this case, students from the first, second, third, and fourth levels, to determine if there are statistically significant differences among them.

Table 3 explores the differences in students' perceptions of YouTube's impact on speaking skills across the four academic levels (first to fourth). The analysis was conducted using a one-way ANOVA test, which determines whether the mean differences between these levels are statistically significant. This part of the study is crucial for understanding whether learners' attitudes evolve as they progress in their academic journey. The descriptive statistics show a clear upward trend in students' perceptions with academic progression: First Level: Mean = 3.3503, Second Level: Mean = 3.8059, Third Level: Mean = 3.6044, Fourth Level: Mean = 4.0952.

Table 3. One-Way ANOVA – Differences by Academic Level.

Academic Level	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
First level	14	3.3503	0.51376
Second level	13	3.8059	0.74623
Third level	13	3.6044	0.68357
Fourth level	13	4.0952	0.36937
Total	53	3.7071	0.64095

The ANOVA test reveals a statistically significant difference across levels ($p = 0.016$), confirming that academic level does influence students' perception of YouTube's effectiveness in improving speaking skills. Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey test indicated that a significant difference exists between first and fourth levels (mean difference = 0.7449, $p = 0.011$). This result suggests that more advanced students perceive YouTube as substantially more beneficial than beginners. The fourth-level students reported the highest level of agreement, which could be attributed to their better language proficiency, more experience with online resources, and possibly greater self-directed learning habits.

On the other hand, first-level students showed the lowest mean, indicating that they may not yet have developed the skills or autonomy to use YouTube effectively as a learning tool. Their unfamiliarity with authentic content or limited vocabulary might also contribute to their relatively lower perceptions.

The results from **Table 3** highlight that students' perceptions of YouTube as a tool for improving speaking skills significantly improve with academic advancement. The statistically significant difference between the lowest and highest levels supports the notion that learners' engagement with and benefit from YouTube increases as their linguistic competence and learning autonomy grow.

3.1. In-Depth Interpretation of Mean Score Variations by Gender and Academic Levels

The descriptive statistics of individual items showed that the mean scores ranged from 3.0189 (Q1) to 3.9434 (Q15 and Q21), with most responses clustering between 3.6 and 3.9. This distribution indicates a generally positive perception among EFL students regarding YouTube's effect on speaking skills. From a gender perspective, male students recorded a higher average mean (3.8800) compared to female students (3.5527). This suggests that male participants perceived YouTube as a more effective tool in enhancing their speaking abilities. Their responses consistently exceeded the average item mean (approximately 3.7), indicating greater confidence or engagement with YouTube content. On the other hand, female students' scores, while still positive, aligned more closely with the lower range of item means, reflecting comparatively moderate or varied views.

In terms of academic level, a progressive increase in mean scores was observed as students advanced through their levels. First-level students scored the lowest mean (3.3503), suggesting limited confidence or exposure. Meanwhile, fourth-level students achieved the highest mean (4.0952), even surpassing the male average, indicating a significantly stronger perception of YouTube's effectiveness. This trend points to the influence of language maturity and accumulated learning experience over time.

When examining both variables together, fourth-level students and males emerged as the groups with the most favorable perceptions. Notably, the gap between males and females (0.3273) was slightly smaller than the gap between first- and fourth-level students (0.7449), suggesting that educational progression plays a more prominent role than gender in shaping learners' attitudes.

As shown in **Table 4**, fourth-level students reported the highest mean (4.0952), reflecting the strongest positive perception of YouTube's role in developing speaking skills. This is followed closely by male students (3.8800) and second-level students (3.8059). In contrast, first-level students and female students had the lowest means, suggesting a more moderate or uncertain attitude.

Table 4. Summary of Mean Scores by Gender and Academic Level.

Category	Mean
Male students	3.8800
Female students	3.5527
First-level students	3.3503
Second-level students	3.8059
Third-level students	3.6044
Fourth-level students	4.0952

In conclusion, this analysis highlights two key patterns: first, that academic level is a strong determinant of students' perception, with more advanced learners showing greater confidence in YouTube's role in developing speaking skills; and second, that gender also influences perception, albeit to a lesser extent, with males consistently rating the platform more positively than females.

3.2. Qualitative Analysis

Semi-structured interviews with eight students (four males, four females) revealed several recurring themes related to how YouTube supports speaking proficiency. Their voices are highlighted below.

3.3. Fluency and Confidence

Students consistently reported greater fluency through exposure to authentic, unscripted speech. One participant explained: *"When I listen to YouTubers, I feel like I'm practicing real conversation. I can speak more quickly now without stopping too much"* (Participant 3). Another added: *"At first I was shy, but after watching and copying the videos, I became more confident to speak in class"* (Participant 6).

3.4. Comprehension

Subtitles and visual support helped learners decode fast speech. As one student noted: *"I always turn on subtitles at the beginning, but later I don't need them because I understand more from the voice and expressions"* (Participant 1). This gradual shift showed improved listening comprehension and independence.

3.5. Grammar

Learners approached grammar differently, but both rule-based and context-based learning were effective. *"When the YouTuber explains grammar in a funny way, I remember it better than my textbook"* (Participant 5). Another shared: *"I just listen, and later I realize I am using the correct tense without thinking"* (Participant 8).

3.6. Vocabulary

Students stressed the value of vocabulary learned in context. One participant commented: *"I learn words I can really use, like when I watch cooking channels and later use the same words in class"* (Participant 2). Others kept notebooks of new phrases, saying: *"I pause the video, write down the words, and then I try to say them myself"* (Participant 7).

3.7. Pronunciation

Improvement was linked to imitation and repetition. *"I practice shadowing the YouTubers. My friends told me my pronunciation is better now"* (Participant 4). Exposure to different accents also increased awareness: *"Before, I only knew American English, but now I can understand British and even Australian accents"* (Participant 6).

3.8. Learning Habits and Strategies

Frequency of use varied, but most engaged actively. *"Every night I watch at least one video in English, and I repeat difficult parts three or four times"* (Participant 2). This demonstrated self-directed learning and persistence.

3.9. Confidence beyond the Classroom

Perhaps the strongest impact was psychological. *"Now I don't feel afraid to speak English, even if I make mistakes, because I practiced so much with YouTube"* (Participant 3). Another explained: *"I used to avoid talking in English club, but now I feel ready to join conversations"* (Participant 8).

Overall, participants viewed YouTube as more than entertainment; it was a platform for meaningful practice, helping them achieve fluency, accuracy, and self-confidence in authentic ways.

4. Discussion

The results indicate that confidence and motivation received the highest ratings, while vocabulary also benefited significantly. The study revealed that YouTube enhanced learners' speaking fluency and confidence, supporting the findings of Pakpahan [1] and Musdayanti et al. [2], who also reported improvements in fluency through YouTube-assisted learning. Similar results were observed in Saudi Arabia by Yassin [3], who highlighted not only linguistic gains but also increased cultural awareness.

Also, Students in this study mentioned that watching authentic YouTube content reduced their anxiety and improved spontaneous speech production. This aligns with Anggraini [53], who noted that classroom speaking anxiety could be mitigated through digital media exposure.

Furthermore, YouTube was also perceived as a powerful tool for vocabulary enrichment, particularly through exposure to authentic and contextualized content. These findings resonate with Yawiloeng [28], who emphasized the role of authentic videos in vocabulary learning, and Arifani [29], who demonstrated the effectiveness of subtitled YouTube videos.

Besides, the current findings showed that students improved their pronunciation and accuracy, particularly in terms of stress and intonation. This is consistent with studies such as Hoang [58], who used YouGlish for pronunciation training, and Habibi et al. [35], who demonstrated the importance of supra-segmental features in YouTube-assisted learning. Additionally, shadowing and mimicking strategies, as reported by Tasyawfi and Lolita [34], were also adopted by some of the participants in this study, indicating convergence with prior research.

Likewise, motivation emerged as one of the strongest outcomes, echoing the findings of Yahaya and Ahmad [14], Ate and Anuno [16], who highlighted YouTube's role in encouraging self-directed learning. The current study also parallels Aprianto [65], who reported a significant correlation between YouTube use and learners' overall language proficiency. Students noted that the diversity of topics and interactive features (comments, likes, and shares) kept them engaged, which supports Ilyas and Putri [13] who emphasized the cognitive engagement potential of video learning.

A recurrent theme in the interviews was dissatisfaction with traditional grammar-based methods, which students felt did not provide enough opportunities for oral practice. This concern is not new, as Tsui [55] observed similar patterns across Asia. In contrast, digital tools such as YouTube provided more learner-centred, interactive experiences [47] aligning with broader trends in mobile-assisted and computer-assisted learning [8–11].

While the results reinforce global findings (e.g., Shamshiri et al. [10]; Almasifar and Heidari [11]), they also fill a regional gap in Yemeni EFL research, where limited studies have been conducted (Al-Jaro and Asmawi [49]). The evidence here demonstrates that Yemeni learners respond similarly to international learners in terms of motivation, vocabulary, and fluency, yet face unique contextual challenges such as limited infrastructure and traditional teaching dominance.

5. Conclusions

This study explored how EFL students perceive the use of YouTube in improving their speaking skills. Overall, the findings show that students tend to view YouTube as an enjoyable and useful tool that helps them improve pronunciation, expand vocabulary, and build confidence in speaking through exposure to real-life language use. Students particularly appreciated the easy access to diverse content and the flexibility to learn at their own pace. At the same time, they pointed out several challenges, including the potential for distraction, the absence of clear learning structure, and varying quality of available materials. These findings suggest that although YouTube cannot replace traditional classroom instruction, it can serve as a valuable supplementary tool when thoughtfully integrated into EFL teaching.

5.1. Recommendations of the Study

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations are proposed for pedagogical practice and curriculum development. First, EFL instructors are encouraged to integrate YouTube more systematically into speaking instruction, as the platform has been shown to positively influence students' speaking skills, particularly at higher academic levels. Teachers should carefully select or design YouTube-based materials that align with course objectives and learners' proficiency levels to maximize instructional effectiveness.

Second, given the observed differences in perceptions based on gender, educators and curriculum designers should adopt gender-sensitive instructional strategies. This may include providing varied types of video content, interaction formats, and speaking tasks to ensure equitable engagement and learning opportunities for both male and female students.

Third, curriculum developers are advised to incorporate YouTube-based activities progressively across academic levels. Lower-level students may benefit from guided viewing and structured speaking tasks, while higher-level students can be encouraged to engage in more autonomous and critical speaking activities, such as discussions, presentations, and reflective responses to video content.

Fourth, teacher training programs should include professional development on the pedagogical use of digital media tools like YouTube. Enhancing instructors' digital literacy and instructional design skills can help ensure that technology integration supports meaningful language learning rather than passive consumption.

Fifth, to optimize the use of YouTube in EFL learning, it is essential for teachers to thoughtfully select content that aligns with students' linguistic proficiency. They should also integrate metacognitive strategies to enhance the learning experience. They are encouraged to prompt students to predict content before viewing and to maintain listening logs to reflect on comprehension and language use. Such strategies encourage learners to engage actively with the material and develop self-awareness in their language acquisition process.

Sixth, for beginner learners, unedited or highly complex videos may be overwhelming; therefore, materials that are simplified, accompanied by subtitles, or supported with guided activities are likely to be more effective.

They can also adopt structured approaches to maximize learning from YouTube. One effective method is the "3x3 Method," in which learners watch a video three times with distinct focal points: first, for general comprehension; second, for vocabulary acquisition and pronunciation practice; and third, to analyze non-verbal cues such as facial expressions and intonation. This layered approach fosters both linguistic and pragmatic development.

5.2. Suggestions for Further Studies

It is worth noting that the findings of this study are mainly specific to the English Department at Seiyun University, so they should be interpreted within this context and cannot be directly generalized to all EFL learners or other universities. That said, many of the challenges and experiences reported by the participants are similar to those found in other EFL programs, so the findings may be relevant and useful in comparable contexts. Therefore, interested researchers are encouraged to carry out similar studies and involve larger and more diverse samples across multiple institutions to enhance the generalizability of the findings.

Additionally, for future research, Longitudinal and experimental studies could further investigate the causal effects of YouTube on speaking skill development. Moreover, future studies may explore additional variables, such as learners' motivation, learning styles, and digital competence, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how YouTube influences EFL speaking proficiency.

Finally, platform developers, including YouTube, can contribute to language learning by implementing features tailored to EFL learners. For example, interactive transcripts, adjustable playback speed based on proficiency, and embedded comprehension quizzes could promote active engagement and scaffold learners' progress, making the platform a more effective tool for language development.

Author Contributions

M.S.A.-J. was responsible for the overall conceptualization and design of the study. He developed the research framework, supervised the data collection process, and prepared the initial manuscript draft. He also coordinated subsequent revisions and oversaw the final submission. R.A.F. and A.A.S. contributed by refining the manuscript, ensuring accuracy in referencing and formatting, and providing critical feedback throughout the revision process to strengthen the clarity and coherence of the final paper. The remaining authors, E.B.S., K.B., R.B., M.B., M.B.H. and N.B.S., a team of graduate students working under the guidance of the first author, played an active role in various stages of the project. Their contributions included assisting with the development of research instruments, participating in data collection, conducting parts of the data analysis, and drafting sections of the initial manuscript. All authors reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript and take collective responsibility for the integrity of the work.

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Institutional Review Board Statement

The study was carried out in line with accepted ethical standards for research involving human participants. All individuals who took part were informed about the aims of the study and assured that their participation was voluntary, with the option to withdraw at any stage without any negative consequences.

Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study, and steps were taken to safeguard confidentiality and privacy. Personal details were not disclosed, and the data collected were used exclusively for research purposes.

Data Availability Statement

The data of this study can be obtained from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. While the raw datasets are not publicly available in order to protect participant confidentiality, anonymized versions may be

shared with qualified researchers for academic and non-commercial use.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors confirm that they have no financial interests, personal relationships, or other circumstances that could have influenced the work presented in this manuscript.

AI Use Statement

The authors used ChatGPT (OpenAI) and Grammarly (Premium version, 2024) solely for grammar checking, sentence structure refinement, and improving the readability of the English text in this manuscript. The authors take full responsibility for all academic content, including all ideas, data, analyses, and conclusions presented herein. The use of AI was thoroughly reviewed and supervised by the authors.

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