



Research Article

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French and Chinese Third Language Learners' Communication Apprehension in a Nigerian University: Influence of Prior Knowledge and Their Demographic Profiles

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Abstract

Our study examined the influence of third language learners' prior knowledge and socio-demographic variables on their communication apprehension. Two hundred and twenty-six third language learners (French n=136 and Chinese n= 90) participated in the study. Data obtained were subjected to point-biserial, multiple regression and t-test statistics. We found that participants' prior knowledge of their target languages has significant main effects on their communication apprehension. Significant mean differences occurred in the level of communication apprehension as a result of participants' gender, language of specialization and level of parental education. Regression analysis showed that the joint contribution of prior knowledge, parental level of education, language of specialization and gender on third language learners' communication apprehension was significant; contributing 13.4% to explain the variances in response. Language of specialization and prior knowledge made significant individual contributions to students' communication apprehension with language of specialization being the most individual contributor to the variances in students' responses. Our study has implications for curriculum planners given that if third language curricula are designed to link what is learnt in the university to what is learnt at the primary and secondary schools, learners will find the target language familiar, which may help them overcome the feelings of communication apprehension.

Keywords: *Chinese language, French Language, communication apprehension, third language, prior knowledge and demographic variable*

1. Introduction

Employability of foreign language students after they have graduated from school is largely dependent on their communication competence (Meghar & Chuah, 2012). This explains why proficiency in a foreign language is pivotal to third language learners. However, research has shown

that despite the efforts some foreign language students make in order to develop their speaking skills, communication apprehension has continued to pose as a major psychological challenge hindering them from attaining the desired level of proficiency in their oral performance (Nuraqilah & Aminabibi, 2019). Communication apprehension is simply referred to as the anxiety to communicate with people (Kralova, 2016). Over the years, studies have demonstrated that the majority of foreign language learners do suffer from this problem, and that the level of the apprehension ranges from moderate to high (Baemir, 2009; Nuraqilah & Aminabibi, 2019; Rafel et. al., 2014).

Foreign language students, chronologically, have the foreign language being studied as either the first or second foreign language they have encountered throughout their lifetime. According to Hammaberg (2018), students who have the foreign language being studied as their first foreign language are regarded as second language learners while students who are in the process of learning a second or additional foreign language are referred to as third language learners. In Nigeria, English language is usually learnt as the first foreign language. This is because English language is the nation's lingua franca and functions generally as a language of communication among people of different ethnic groups in the country. Meanwhile, additional foreign languages such as French and Chinese are also learnt in Nigeria. Anchoring on Hammerberg's (2018) assertion, learners of English language in Nigeria can be referred to as second language learners while learners of French and Chinese can as well be referred to as third language learners.

Considering the issue of communication apprehension, third language learners, particularly in Nigeria may have a greater tendency of being communication apprehensive. This is based on the fact that foreign languages learnt as third languages in Nigeria may not be sufficiently practiced in real life contexts of the target language. The reason being that third languages are known to be spoken only by a knowledgeable few, and in limited contexts too which are mainly the classrooms (Lana & Yahya, 2013). By implication, third language learners in Nigeria are limited to practicing their target languages solely in the classroom contexts. This could pre-dispose them to communication apprehension. As might be expected, being limited to practicing a foreign language solely in the classroom contexts is unlikely to guarantee sufficient practice in that language, and lack or insufficient practice in a foreign language is one of the major causes of communication apprehension (Sadighi & Dastpak, 2017).

Communication apprehension is also believed to be associated with specific negative effects such as avoidance of communication in the target language by students especially in front of an audience, development of low self-esteem, withdrawal, reticence etc. (Molnar & Crnjak, 2018; Mustapha & Khalil, 2018). The extent to which communication apprehension and its associated adverse effects manifest is dependent on a number of factors which may include students' prior knowledge of the target language before studying it at the university level, parental level of education, language of specialization and gender.

Prior knowledge refers to the totality of information that learners have about a subject matter (Brandao & Oakhill, 2005). The need to investigate prior knowledge as a potential contributory factor to foreign language students' communication apprehension is informed by Zashchitina and Moysyak's (2017, p.2) assertion that "foreign language students learn effectively when they already know something about a content area and when concepts in that area are familiar to them". This could suggest that students who already had a prior knowledge of a foreign language before studying it at the university level may tend to experience lower level of communication apprehension. In Nigeria, while French language learning is officially incorporated in both the primary and secondary school curriculum, Chinese language is not. Chinese language students are thereby presumed to have just encountered the language at the university level and thereby had no prior knowledge of the target language before studying it at the university level. In view of this, one could postulate that Chinese language students may be more communication apprehensive than French language students.

Considering the influence of parental level of education on the communication apprehension of students, Muruwei (2011) opined that the level of education of parents is perceived seen as a significant factor in their language learning. Parental level of education reveals whether the parents of foreign language students are educated or not. According to Murith (2015), while some parents

encourage and support their children to learn additional foreign languages, some do not. The difference in the level of support and attitude of these different groups of parents may be based on the differences in their level of educational attainment (Bago, 2018). Parents who are more educated are more likely to understand the benefits of learning a foreign, and may also be more inclined to knowing the steps to take in guiding their children towards being successful in foreign language learning (Hosseinpour, Sherkatolabbasi & Yarahmadi, 2015). On the other hand, though parents with lower or no level of education may be concerned about their children's academic challenges, it is perceived that they lack the intellectual capacity to construct ideas and guide their children properly towards academic success (Singh, Horo & Singh, 2016). By implication, children of educated parents are likely to develop a more positive and confident attitude when faced with an academic challenge than the children whose parents lack education (Khan, Iqbal & Tasneem, 2015).

Language of specialization is another variable of interest that could explain communication apprehension experienced among third language learners. Language of specialization has to do with the specific language of interest studied by students. In the context of our study, some participants have their specialty in the study of French language, while some specialized in Chinese language. The essential roles these languages; French (Omonigho, 2016) and Chinese (Odinye, 2015) play in Nigeria point to the need to study them as full-fledged academic courses in Nigerian universities. Though French language is the second official language in Nigeria, it is still poorly learnt especially at both the primary and secondary schools levels. On the other hand, Chinese language is perceived to be difficult to learn, considering its 'character-based writing system and tonal nature' (Luo, 2014). It is possible that these peculiarities evident in French and Chinese languages could make their learners experience anxiety when speaking in the language. Hence, there is a need to investigate if language of specialization could be a contributory factor to third language learners' communication apprehension.

Another demographic variable that would be considered in this study is the gender of learners. The influence of gender on foreign language students' ability to successfully attain proficiency in the four language skills has been investigated particularly, with respect to foreign language anxiety as a whole (Aydin et. al, 2017). Adequate attention has not been given specifically to the study of gender influence on communication apprehension (Stawiarska & Malgorzata, 2014). Meanwhile, Churgai (2015) explained that there is a perceived tendency that men and women differ in their ability to communicate in a language. Based on this assertion, it becomes necessary to also investigate if the differences in the level of communication apprehension experienced among third language learners is actually related to their gender differences.

2. Literature Review

In the field of foreign language learning, communication apprehension is a major challenge faced by most foreign language students. Speaking in a foreign language which is one of the main goals of learning a language, and which ordinarily should be a much desired or fun activity has, on the contrary, shown to lead communication apprehension (Ozturk & Gurbuz, 2013; Shabani, 2013). Amara (2018) reported that some foreign language students experience communication apprehension due to inadequate practice time, insecurity and fear. To reduce the adverse effects of communication apprehension on foreign language students' speaking skills, researchers and educators are working indefatigably to investigate the variables that contribute to foreign language students' communication apprehension.

The study by Shabani (2013) involved 10 English foreign language students in Iran conducted in a pre-university class. The results revealed that prior knowledge has a significant effect on students' ability to speak fluently in a foreign language. From his study, he noted that the more background knowledge students have about a topic or a subject matter, the more they can easily talk about them. Hasan, Gushendra and Yonantha (2017) found a strong positive correlation between prior knowledge and students' listening comprehension. They concluded that the influence of prior knowledge on students' listening comprehension is very high. Seery (2009) therefore submitted that prior

knowledge provides students with an established background on which to build future knowledge and as a result, students with a prior knowledge tend to approach a subject with a more confident and positive attitude than students who do not have a prior knowledge.

Researchers have reported that having a prior knowledge of a subject matter before studying it at a more advanced level influences students' achievement, and as well contributes to their learning (Arifin, 2019; Hailikari & Ylanne, 2008; Star et. al., 2009). In 2012, Yeh examined how prior knowledge can influence students' gaining of an understanding when reading Chinese as a second language and found prior knowledge was influential on deeper understanding of the language. A study by Liu, Lin & Paas (2014) involving eighty-one fifth grade students was conducted in a primary school in Taiwan. The findings from both the first and second experiment of the study revealed significant difference in the performances of those with higher prior knowledge and those with lower prior knowledge. In line with these, Nioutsikos (2017) recommended that it is pertinent to assess students' prior knowledge at the beginning of an academic activity in order to discover what they already know and so as to also facilitate their learning experience.

Zhou (2020) in his study noted that parental education is a factor that has an impact on second language learning. He posits that while some parents are involved in their wards' learning of a second language, others play a passive role; and that the difference in parental attitude towards foreign language learning may be dependent on their education. Khan, Iqbal and Tasneem (2015) found that parents with higher educational attainment are usually interested in their children's learning and that to some extent, they have more influence on their children which invariably leads to the children's academic success. Terfassa (2018) examined the association that exists between the education level of parents and pupils' academic output in Dire Dawa, Ethiopia and found that a significant relationship.

Similar studies on educational level of parents and students' performance in foreign language learning indicated that the level of education of parents significantly influence students' learning (Bakar, Mamat & Ibrahim, 2017; Chemagosi, 2020; Musarat et. al, 2013; Odoh, Ugwuanyi, Odigbo & Chukwuani, 2017). In addition, Khodadady and Alaei (2012) conducted a study involving 1352 high school students in Mashhad which revealed a significant difference between the English foreign language (EFL) achievement of third graders whose parents have a higher level of education and those whose parents have a lower level of education. Muruwei (2011) concluded that the higher parental education is a determinant to their children excelling and performing better in their studies. Panferov (2010) recommended that there is a need for English Language learners' (ELL) parents to be literate enough to ascertain the educational and literary needs of their children as it tends to exert a positive influence in learning a foreign language.

Though it appears to be difficult to find studies that have compared communication apprehension of third language learners who specialize in different language courses, there is research evidence showing that some language languages may evoke communication apprehension more than others. The study by Luo (2014) involving 257 Chinese foreign language (CFL) learners at two large public universities in the U.S. revealed that College-level CFL learners in the U.S were not highly anxious about communicating in Chinese. Zhao and Whitchurch (2011) also found that the mean item response for English-speaking CFL learners' language anxiety was not very high, indicating that they were just a little anxious about learning Chinese. On the other hand, Darmawangsa and Sukmayadi (2020) examined first year students' communication apprehension in learning French as a foreign language and found that with an average overall score of 73.2, the first year students' communication apprehension ranged from moderate to high. They concluded from their findings that these students tend to experience communication apprehension when they are asked to speak publicly in a foreign language. In addition, a study conducted by Obinna, Maduagwu, Nelson and Onyeka (2019) involving 300 senior secondary school French students in Imo state, Nigeria, showed that communication apprehension is high among the French students.

Furthermore, research on gender as one of the factors influencing the level of apprehension experienced among foreign language students when speaking in a foreign language have yielded conflicting results. According to Cagatay (2015), most studies reveal with empirical evidence that

females are more communication apprehensive than males. Vasiliki et al., (2015) also found that females experience higher level of anxiety when communicating in English as a second language than their male counterparts. In contrast, Dogan & Tuncer (2016) documented that males experience a higher level of communication apprehension than females. Meanwhile, Ying (2018) demonstrated that there are no gender differences relating to communication apprehension.

From the review, it can be observed that most available studies carried out were mainly on learners of English language as a foreign language (EFL) and a second language (L2). Most of the studies were on second language learners, with little or no attention given to third language learners. Furthermore, literature appears to be inadequate to help researchers understand communication apprehension among learners of other foreign languages other than English language. Specifically, the influence of prior knowledge and demographic factors on communication apprehension of third language learners appears grossly underexplored. This study, therefore, seeks to address these gaps in literature. To understand the issue of communication apprehension of third language learners, the role of prior knowledge and three demographic factors which are parental level of education, language of specialization and gender were explored. The following research questions are formulated to guide the study.

1. What are participants' mean scores on communication apprehension?
2. What is the relationship between the participants' prior knowledge, demographic variables (parental level of education, language of specialization, gender) and their communication apprehension?

It was also hypothesized that:

1. Significant differences do not occur in third language learners' responses based on their prior knowledge and demographic variables (parental level of education, language of specialization, gender).
2. There is no significant relationship between third language learners' prior knowledge, demographic variables (parental level of education, language of specialization, gender) and communication apprehension.
3. Third language learners' prior knowledge, parental level of education, language of specialization and gender do not significantly predict their communication apprehension.

3. Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. Loeb et al (2017) posited that a descriptive survey research is appropriate for a study that describes a population or a phenomenon. It can answer questions about what, where, when, who and to what extent. The population of the study consisted of all the undergraduate French and Chinese language students in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka during the 2020-2021 academic year. The total number of these students is 321 (which comprised 185 French students and 136 Chinese students). This number excludes the fifty three 300-level French and Chinese students (French n=38 and Chinese n=15) who were doing their one year immersion program abroad. As the study was conducted during the second phase of the Covid-19 pandemic, the researchers made use of the Google forms in Google docs to get through to the respondents. The items of the instruments were embedded in the Google docs. The Google docs with the link - https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSctWVZHWkC_Vgo9n7lscLIP-WIJ_kimboFn_qUwTg3PYIoC6w/viewform - was sent to the French students' WhatsApp platform with the aid of their course representatives. Another Google docs link - <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdEfvmGeF8rY07UHW5iXrAWzq9Efj8flG8kM2yl9fgnj92ALw/viewform> - was sent to the Chinese students WhatsApp platform also with the aid of their course representatives. These course representatives facilitated the students to respond to the instruments. On the whole, a total of 226 students (French n= 136 and Chinese n=90) responded, representing 70.4% of the total population (French n= 73.51% and Chinese n=66.17%). In other words, 226 students (French n=136 and Chinese n= 90) who gave their consent to the study were used. Their responses were received within a period of one month -

19th January, 2021 through 19th February, 2021.

4. Research Instruments

Data were gathered with these adapted survey instruments: the Prior Knowledge Inventory (PKI) and the Foreign Language Communication Apprehension Questionnaire (FLCAQ). The researchers used the demographic section of the questionnaire to get the background information of the participants in three subcategories: parental level of education, language of specialization and gender. Parents who never obtained a post-secondary education qualification were considered to have low educational qualifications while those who acquired a tertiary education qualification were considered to have high educational qualification. The PKI consisted of 5 items that explored whether the language students had acquired any knowledge of their target language before enrolling to study it at the university level. They were modified from Nioutsikos' (2017) Prior Educational Experience (PEE). The FLCAQ addressed students' communication apprehension, which consisted of 10 questions that were selected and adapted from Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope's (1986) Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). The reliability coefficients of the instruments were established using Cronbach's alpha. The reliability coefficients were 0.71 for PKI and 0.89 for FLCAQ. Point-biserial, multiple regressions and the independent t-test statistics were used for data analysis.

5. Result

Table 1: Respondents' Characteristics

Variable		Frequency	Percentage
Highest Level of Fathers' education	No education	9	4.0
	FSLC	58	25.7
	WASSCE/NECO/GCE	59	26.1
	OND	8	3.5
	NCE	9	4.0
	HND/BSC/BA	43	19.0
	Masters	21	9.3
	PHD	19	8.4
	Total	226	100.0
Highest Level of mother's education	No education	8	3.5
	FSLC	38	16.8
	WASSCE/NECO/GCE	71	31.4
	OND	5	2.2
	NCE	13	5.8
	HND/BSC/BA	53	23.5
	Masters	26	11.5
	PHD	12	5.3
	Total	226	100.0
Categorization of fathers' levels of Education	low education	127	56.2
	high education	99	43.8
	Total	226	100.0
Categorization of mothers' levels of Education	low education	114	50.4
	high education	112	49.6
	Total	226	100.0
Gender	Male	61	27.0
	Female	165	73.0
	Total	226	100.0
Language of Specialization	French	135	59.7
	Chinese	91	40.3
	Total	226	100.0

Table 1 showed the respondents' characteristics. The majority of the parents of the respondents did not attend tertiary institutions with the mothers possessing a greater number of higher education qualifications than the fathers of the respondents. Thus, the parents' highest level of education falls within low education category. Also, female students constituted the majority of the respondents; while the majority of the respondents specialized on French language.

Table 2: Mean Scores, Standard Deviation and ANOVA Test on Prior Knowledge and Communication Apprehension

Variables	No	Mean on Comp. Appr.	Stand Dev	df	F-value	Sign
I learnt French/Chinese in primary school only	Not at all	147	2.71	.48	4.439	.005
	a bit	53	2.99	.52		
	moderately well	16	2.72	.54		
	very well	10	2.67	.35		
	Total	226	2.78	.50		
I learnt French/Chinese in secondary school only	Not at all	115	2.72	.52	2.677	.048
	a bit	84	2.88	.46		
	moderately well	21	2.80	.55		
	very well	6	2.42	.30		
	Total	226	2.78	.50		
I learnt French/Chinese in both my primary and secondary school	Not at all	113	2.72	.48	3.661	.013
	a bit	75	2.91	.50		
	moderately well	28	2.77	.54		
	very well	10	2.45	.47		
	Total	226	2.78	.50		
I learnt French/Chinese in a French/Chinese country	Not at all	174	2.80	.51	3.020	.031
	a bit	35	2.81	.46		
	moderately well	8	2.43	.43		
	very well	9	2.43	.32		
	Total	226	2.78	.50		
There is a link between the module of syllabus of French/Chinese in the university and the prior knowledge I already had before enrollment	Not at all	96	2.83	.56	.772	.511
	a bit	84	2.76	.40		
	moderately well	26	2.67	.54		
	very well	20	2.75	.53		
	Total	226	2.78	.50		

ANOVA statistics in Table 2 showed a significant main effect of students' responses on the level of their prior French/Chinese learning experience in primary school on their communication apprehension $F(3, 222) = 4.439, p < .05$.

There was also significant main effects of students' responses on the level of their prior French/Chinese learning experiences in secondary schools on their communication apprehension, $F(3, 222) = 2.677, p < .05$; in learning in both primary and secondary schools on their communication apprehension, $F(3, 222) = 3.661, p < .05$; in the country of where the French/Chinese is a lingua Franca on their communication apprehension $F(3, 222) = 3.020, p < .05$.

However, there was no significant main effect in the responses of students regarding the level of the link between the module of syllabus of French/Chinese in the university and their prior knowledge before enrollment in the university on their communication apprehension $F(3, 222) = .772, p > .05$.

Table 3: T-test Statistic on Mean Differences according to Respondents' Gender and Fathers' Education, Mothers' Education, Language of Specialization and their communication apprehension

Variables	Demographic	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	sign
Gender and communication apprehension	Male	2.70	.50	-1.426	224	.155
	Female	2.81	.50			
Father Education and communication apprehension	Low Education	2.73	.49	-1.502	224	.134
	High Education	2.83	.52			
Mother Education and communication apprehension	Low Education	2.76	.50	-.478	224	.633
	High Education	2.79	.51			
Language of Specialization and communication apprehension	French	2.89	.50	4.103	224	.000
	Chinese	2.62	.46			

Table 3 shows that male students ($M = 2.70, SD = .50$) had a non-significant lower mean score in their communication apprehension than their female counterparts ($M = 2.81, SD = .50$), $t(224) = -1.426, p > .05$. Furthermore, respondents whose fathers had low education ($M = 2.73, SD = .49$) had a non-significant lower mean score in communication apprehension than their counterparts whose fathers had high education ($M = 2.83, SD = .52$), $t(224) = -1.502, p < .05$; while respondents whose mothers had low education ($M = 2.76, SD = .50$) had a non-significant marginally lower mean score in communication apprehension than their counterparts whose mothers had high education ($M = 2.76, SD = .51$), $t(224) = -.478, p < .05$. However, students whose language of specialization is French language had a significant higher mean score in communication apprehension than their counterparts whose language of specialization is Chinese ($M = 2.89, SD = .50$), $t(224) = 4.103, p < .05$.

Table 4: Correlation Matrix of Students' Prior Knowledge, Level of Mother and Father Education, Language of Specialization, Gender and Communication Apprehension

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
Prior knowledge	-					
Level of mother education	.109	-				
Level of father education	.017	.409**	-			
Language of specialization	-.568**	-.038	-.034	-		
Gender	.217**	.044	-.066	-.273**	-	
Communication apprehension	-.040	.032	.100	-.264**	.095	-

Table 4 showed the relationship existing between the independent variables and the dependent variable. It showed that prior knowledge, level of mother and father education, and gender had no significant relationships with communication apprehension, $r(226) = -.040, p > .05$; $r(226) = .032, p > .05$; $r(226) = .095, p > .05$ respectively. However, the language of specialization had negative significant relationship with communication apprehension $r(226) = -.264, p < .05$.

Table 5: Multiple Regression Analysis for Predictor Variables and Communication Apprehension

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	3.262	.230		14.151	.000
Gender	.057	.074	.051	.772	.441
Level of father edu	.092	.070	.091	1.314	.190
Level of mother edu	.008	.069	.008	.118	.906
Language of specialization	-.418	.079	-.410	-5.268	.000
Prior knowledge	-.232	.062	-.286	-3.722	.000
R	.366 ^a				
R ²	.134				
F	6.810				.000

The result in Table 5 shows that the multiple regression coefficients (R) were .366 while R^2 was .134. This is an indication that the predictor variables jointly contributed 13.4% to explain the variances in response and the corresponding $F(5, 220) = 6.810$, is statistically significant ($p < .05$). Using standardized (B), the table indicated that language of specialization and prior knowledge made significant individual contributions to students' communication apprehension with language of specialization being the most individual contributor to the variances in response.

6. Discussion

This study primarily sought to investigate the impact of third language learners' prior knowledge, demographic variables (parental level of education, language of specialization, gender) on their communication apprehension. Parental level of education is separated into Fathers' and Mothers' level of education, with these levels of education categorized into high or low. Under language of specialization, some of the participants are specialized in French language, others are third language learners of Chinese.

Preliminary findings of the study revealed that majority of the parents of the participants have low level of education, with the mothers possessing a greater number of higher education qualifications than the fathers. Also, female students constituted the majority of the participants; while the majority of the participants also specialized in the study of French language. This analysis is done in order to give an overview of the participants' characteristics. It is also believed that these participants' characteristics are relevant in understanding the findings of the study.

One important finding of this study is the impact of participants' prior knowledge on their communication apprehension. Participants' prior knowledge of their target languages which they acquired either at the primary school level, secondary school level, both primary and secondary school levels and also during their study abroad, all have significant main effects on their communication apprehension. The least mean scores on communication apprehension occurred when students responded that they had firm prior knowledge on the target language before studying the language in the university. This is in agreement with the findings of Shabani (2013) which showed that prior knowledge has a significant effect on students' ability to speak fluently in a foreign language. Shabani (2013) also noted that the more prior knowledge students have about a topic or a subject matter, the more they can easily talk about them. Similar studies also demonstrated that prior knowledge influence students' performance (Arifin, 2019; Star et. al., 2009). This could imply that having prior knowledge of a target language impacts third language learners' communication apprehension. Considering the link between the module/syllabus of French/Chinese in the university and the students' prior knowledge, our findings showed no significant main effect of this link on participants' communication apprehension. This could be due to the fact that the syllabus at the university level may be more advanced than the syllabus encountered by third language learners at lower levels of their education. Also, the module/syllabus during their immersion programme may also differ since most of the activities at this level may be influenced by the culture of the owners of the target language.

Taking gender into consideration, the findings from this study showed that male students had a non-significant lower mean score in their communication apprehension than their female counterparts. Though non-significant, the finding implies that female students may be more communication apprehensive than males. This corroborates with a similar study by Vasiliki et. al., (2015) which revealed that female students experience higher level of anxiety when communicating in English as a second language than their male counterparts. Cagatay (2015) also noted that most studies reveal that female students are more communication apprehensive than male students. This could be as a result of their shy and sensitive nature. However, there are also other works which have shown contradictory findings (Dogana & Tuncer, 2016; Ying, 2018). This is an indication that research on the impact of gender differences on communication apprehension needs more in depth investigations.

Another important finding of the study is the impact of parental level of education on participants' communication apprehension. Participants whose fathers had low education had a non-significant lower mean score in communication apprehension than their counterparts whose fathers had high education. In the same vein, participants whose mothers had low education had a non-significant marginally lower mean score in communication apprehension than their counterparts whose mothers had high education. Generally, this implies that though non-significant, students whose parents had high level of education tend to experience communication apprehension more than their counterparts. This finding contradicts that of Muruwei (2011) who found that the more educated parents are, the more likely it is that their children will excel and perform better in academic-related challenges. However, it could be that due to the interest these educated parents show in their children's ability to communicate in a foreign language, some learners may feel pressured to the point that they become apprehensive.

Considering the impact of language of specialization on the communication apprehension of third language learners, results from the study revealed that students whose language of specialization is French language had a significant higher mean score in communication apprehension than their counterparts whose language of specialization is Chinese. This implies that French language students are likely to suffer more from communication apprehension than Chinese students. This is in line with Obinna, Maduagwu, Nelson and Onyeka's (2019) findings that communication apprehension evoked the highest level of anxiety among French students. Luo (2014) also revealed that College-level CFL learners in the U.S were not highly anxious about communicating in Chinese. This could be due to the fact that since Chinese language is relatively new in Nigeria (Odinye, 2015), it has lot of incentives and rewards which motivate Chinese students to be able to speak the language and combat any feeling of communication apprehension. On the other hand, though French language has been in vogue as the nation's second official language (Omonigho, 2016), it may have had its enticing rewards at the beginning, but the incentives that motivate students to learn and speak the language, may have also drastically reduced with time. When foreign language students are less motivated, they are likely not going to have the zeal to practice or speak in their target languages and lack of practice in a target language according to Sadighi & Dastpak (2017) is also one of the major causes of communication apprehension.

The multiple regression analysis conducted in the study also showed that the predictor variables accounted for 13.4% variances in third language learners' communication apprehension. However, when looking at the relative contributions of the variables, the results showed that language of specialization and prior knowledge made significant individual contributions to students' communication apprehension with language of specialization being the most individual contributor to the variances in response. This finding is consistent with that of Luo's (2014) and Obinna, Maduagwu, Nelson and Onyeka's (2019) in which languages of specialization were seen to influence Chinese/French students' level of communication apprehension. The present finding also supports that of Shabani (2013), who concluded that the more prior knowledge students have about a topic or a subject matter, the more they can easily talk about them. More so, this implies that prior knowledge is seen to play a significant role in overcoming communication apprehension.

7. Limitations/Implications

The study has limitations which could affect the generalizability of the findings. First is the fact that the data used in the study were obtained from one single university in Nigeria. This could limit the findings of this study to only that university. Another limitation to the study arose as a result of using only a survey questionnaire. Given the fact that communication apprehension is a subjective feeling which is peculiar to each participant, employing a mixed method approach which would involve interviewing some selected students, would have given more robust findings to the study instead of using only questionnaires.

However, the findings of the study has significant educational implications for curriculum

planners in Nigeria. In planning third language learners' curriculum, curriculum planners need to plan it in such a way that there would be a link between the module of syllabus of French/Chinese taught at the university level and also those taught at both the primary and secondary school levels. Based on the findings, it becomes pertinent that foreign languages should first be taught properly at the primary and secondary school levels in order to enable students to learn them effectively as full-fledged academic courses at the university level.

8. Conclusion

This study was necessitated due to the growing concern over the continued experience of communication apprehension among third language learners. Findings from the study have revealed the impact of prior knowledge on third language learners' communication apprehension. Regression analysis also showed that language of specialization and prior knowledge predicted third language learners' communication apprehension. It is concluded therefore that the communication apprehension experienced among third language learners may be linked to factors such as the peculiarity and uniqueness of the language being studied, that is their language of specialization, and also to the level of prior knowledge.

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