

Assessing Communication Apprehension Among In-Service Teachers in A University of Education

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Abstract

This study examined Communication Apprehension among in-service teachers in a university of education in Nigeria with particular focus on the influence of gender and age on CA among the sample. A cross-sectional ex post facto survey design was adopted for the study. Participants were 100 purposively & randomly sampled, in-service teachers drawn from a university of education in Nigeria. There were 35 (35%) males and 65 (65%) females, their ages ranged between 16 – 30 years with a mean age of 22.10 and a standard deviation of 2.48. of these samples, 71 were Christian, 27 Muslims and 2 belong to other religions. 90 of the total sample were singles, while 10 were married. Validated scale was used for data collection and three hypotheses tested using descriptive statistics and t-test for independent samples. Results showed that in-service teachers were not significantly high on CA and gender as well as age was not found to be significant predictors of CA among this sample. This result may be owing to the fact that they were purposive samples who have been exposed to pedagogical training that must have helped them to handle CA. it was recommended that further studies should examine other factors such as psychological and social and increase the sample size as well, cutting across other institutions apart from specialized university.

Keywords: - In-service teachers, Nigeria, University of Education, Education Majors, Communication Apprehension, Pedagogy.

Introduction

Over the years, there has been growing concern over the quality of Nigeria university graduates that is turned out on yearly basis. Many stakeholders have expressed concern that most of the present day graduates lack the skills and communication confidence that befit university graduates. To this end, many have contended the suitability of most Nigeria university graduates for employment in many industries. Despite these expressions of concern and displeasure from different quarters, there is the need to differentiate between incompetence in one's field of study and inability to communicate effectively with others. The reason for this clarification is because, the experience of these researchers from focus group discussion as well as interviews conducted at different times on this issue revealed that there is a gross misconception. Many graduates that have been termed incompetent were actually having communication apprehension. They had a good mastery of their subject matter, but they seem to be apprehensive of communicating their knowledge to others.

It is in the light of the above that the present study embarked on the examination of communication apprehension among in-service teachers from a university of education. This was necessary because it is believed that those who are going to be teachers of teachers should not only be competent regarding the mastery of their subject matter, they should also be able to communicate effectively without any fear or anxiety. In other words, they should be low on communication apprehension.

Communication apprehension (CA) is 'an individual's level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons' (McCroskey 1998). For more than two decades this definition of CA has been used to describe the trait of an individual who has a fear or anxiety about communicating with others. Communication anxiety can be situational rather than pervasive in a child's behavior. "A tendency to be anxious when communicating may be specific to only a few settings (e.g., public speaking) or may exist in most everyday communication situations, or may even be part of a general anxiety trait that arises in many facets of an individual's life" (Friedman, 1980). Much research has dealt with CA in terms of a personality trait, but more recently it has expanded to include both trait and situation views (McCroskey, 1977).

Usually, people who are communication apprehensive may not appear to be apprehensive unless they are in unfamiliar surroundings and with people they are not familiar with. Under normal circumstance, people do not face communication apprehension in supposedly safe and friendly environment. This is because, positive and helpful reactions are affirmed when communicating in a friendly environment hence, the feeling of comfort in sharing information, in giving speech and in answering questions in such a friendly environment. Additionally, as communication does not confine itself to just talk, a person may, for example, be apprehensive about

communicating by engaging in talk but feel quite comfortable while writing (writing is also a sort of communication).

Formal situations rather than informal ones tend to be more restrictive with more rigid behavior rules and communication apprehension increases therein because of the narrower confines. Similarly, communication apprehension can result when a person is in a subordinate position because the person with the higher status defines the boundaries of acceptable behavior. Generally, the more conspicuous a person feels, or the more unfamiliar the situation, the more communication apprehension is likely to be experienced. Likewise people often feel less apprehensive with others who are most like themselves. Sometimes, however, an individual will be more apprehensive with similar peers because they become more concerned with how they will be evaluated by them and the feeling of being evaluated in any situation often leads to anxiety. Majority of people are most comfortable with a moderate degree of attention. When individuals are ignored or stared at, the level of communication apprehension often rises. The level of communication apprehension also often rises where a prior history of failure increases the likelihood of failure again.

Researchers, (e.g. Friedman, 1980) have implicated general personality traits such as quietness, shyness, and reticence as frequent precipitators of CA. however, McCroskey, (1980) and Bond, (1984), have included low intellectual skill, speech skill deficiencies, voluntary social introversion, social alienation, low social self-esteem and ethnic/cultural divergence in communication norms as other possible factors that can precipitate CA in people. Another widely accepted explanation for CA is the Negative Cognitive Appraisal Model (Glaser, 1981). The model assumes that the quiet individual was criticized for his or her early language performance. As a result, he or she must have learnt to expect negative reactions whenever he speaks and subsequently he has learnt to avoid such negative reactions by keeping quiet.

CA is not without its consequences which are emotional, educational, and social. CA and reticence affect the social skills necessary for children to make friends. CA students tend to confine their career aspirations to vocations that require little oral communication. They seem to have a higher need to avoid failure, and they have less achievement or success motivation than other students. In the classroom, the teacher may regard quiet students as "perfect" in that they are not discipline problems. But often the CA students' lack of response or participation has a negative, spiraling affect--they are perceived as less capable, and are thus called on less frequently in class discussion. Their lack of enthusiasm tends to limit teachers' attention to them, which further reinforces their own self-evaluation (Richmond, 1984; Friedman, 1980).

To prevent CA, it means teachers in training will need to take more than an introductory course in oral communication (e.g., a course aimed at understanding the communication behaviors of students) 2. Create basic communication courses in the earlier elementary grades 3. Provide specialized treatment for quiet/shy students on a voluntary basis 4. Develop classroom activities that encourage oral communication. In other words, the in-service teachers must be properly tutored so as to be well equipped to help the student(s) in their classes that may be manifesting CA. this is therefore the more reason why the in-service teachers themselves must not have CA.

This present study therefore, examined CA among in-service teachers in a university of education in Nigeria with particular focus on the influence of gender and age on CA among the sample.

Theoretical basis for CA

Research has failed to find out with absolute certainty the causes of trait-like communication apprehension. Research has been able to show statistical correlations between communication apprehension and theoretically proposed "causes." One particular theory, however, does permit a causal explanation of generalized communication apprehension because it takes into account both personality traits and situational constraints. The theory is expectancy learning, or, more specifically, a type of expectancy learning known as learned helplessness.

The underlying assumption of expectancy learning, as applied to communication apprehension, is that people develop expectations about other people and situations and about the probable outcomes of communication with those people and/or in those situations. A person develops confidence in his or her communication to the extent that such expectations are fulfilled. When expectations are not met, the individual develops a need to form new expectations. If expectations continually are not met, the person may develop a lack of confidence. Anxiety is produced when no appropriate expectations can be formed. Fear is produced when expectations lead to negative outcomes that are difficult or impossible to avoid. These two occurrences, according to expectancy-learning theory, are the foundation of communication apprehension.

People expect to be reinforced for some behaviors and not reinforced for others. Reinforcement, or the lack of it, is the outcome that people learn to expect by continually engaging in certain behaviors over time and across situations. From this process, three things can happen: (1) people develop new positive expectations, (2) people develop new negative expectations, or (3) people become helpless.

When a person engages in communicative behaviors that work i.e., when he or she receives reinforcement for the communication), that person develops positive expectations for those behaviors. The behaviors become a regular part of the person's communicative "storehouse." On the other hand, negative expectations are developed in much the same way as positive expectations. People discover that some communicative behaviors lead to punishment or lack of reinforcement, and they tend to reduce those behaviors. The final thing, apart from the two above is that the individual that manifests communication apprehension can develop a feeling of helplessness eventually.

Basically, there is a dearth of literature in the area of CA among in-service teachers (particularly) within the Nigeria context and this has been a major limitation for this present study, however, three hypotheses were stated and tested in this study.

Hypotheses

1. In-service teachers will be significantly low in Communication Apprehension.
2. Gender will significantly predict communication apprehension among in-service teachers.
3. Age will be a significant predictor of communication apprehension among in-service teachers.

Method

Design

This study adopted a cross-sectional ex-post facto survey research design. This was deemed suitable because the study went out to gather information that already existed among the population of study and the researchers did not consciously or deliberately manipulate any of the variables of interest in the study.

Population

The target population for the study was in-service teachers in a university of education in Nigeria. They were purposively selected for this study.

Participants

Participants were 100 purposively sampled, in-service teachers drawn from a university of education in Nigeria. There were 35 (35%) males and 65 (65%) females, their ages ranged between 16 – 30 years with a mean age of 22.10 and a standard deviation of 2.48. of these samples, 71 were Christian, 27 Muslims and 2 belong to other religions. 90 of the total sample were singles, while 10 were married.

Sample and Sampling Procedure

This research adopted the purposive sampling and random sampling methods for the selection of school and participants respectively. Samples were purposively drawn from a University of Education, since they are in-service teachers who will become practicing teachers after graduation and the researchers are interested in knowing their level of communication apprehension in order to know their readiness for practice after graduation.

Instrument

The questionnaire for data collection was divided into two sections 'A' and 'B'. Section 'A' focused on the demographic data of respondents, while section 'B' was McCroskey (1982)'s 24-item Personal Report of Communication Apprehension scale (known as. PRCA-24). The responses ranged from Strongly Disagree = 1; Disagree = 2; are Neutral = 3; Agree = 4; Strongly Agree =5. Scores below the mean are regarded as low CA while mean score and above are regarded as high CA. initial alpha reliability reported by the author was .90, while for this present study an alpha reliability of .75 was obtained.

Procedure for data collection

Necessary permission was taken from the appropriate quarters and participants were met on an appointed date in their class, were briefed about the research being conducted and their consent sought regarding their willingness to participate in the study. After obtaining their consent, the random sampling (ballot method) was carried out to select those who eventually participated in the study. Thus the 100 participants were selected. The research instrument was administered on them and collected back the same day, since the response time was approximately 12minutes.

Results

Data analysis was done with the version 17 of SPSS and the result is presented below.

The first hypothesis was done using descriptive analysis and the result is represented in the graph in table 1.

Insert table 1 here

52% of the respondents had low CA; while 48% had high C/A. though the sample was small, the percentage of in-service teachers who had high CA was low compared to those who had high CA.

The second hypothesis was established with the use of the independent t-test statistic and the result shows that gender is not a significant predictor of CA among in-service teachers. In other words, whether an individual is a man or woman does not have any significant influence on his or her manifestation of CA.

Insert table 2 here

The third hypothesis was also analyzed using the independent t-test statistic and the result showed that there is no statistically significant difference between communication apprehension among young and old in-service teachers. Although there is a little mean difference, it is not statistically significant; hence the conclusion that age does not significantly predict CA among in-service teachers.

Insert table 3 here

Discussion

That in-service teachers are low on CA could be taken to imply that they must have been well prepared for their future career. As education majors, they must have been exposed to several pedagogical trainings that are aimed at preparing them for better teaching performance and experience by the time they graduate from school and they start practice. This must have accounted for their manifestation of low CA. In addition, the respondents have gone through micro-teaching experience as well as a six (6) month teaching in practice schools and were supervised by experienced lecturers who must have corrected them during the exercise (hence the low CA manifested). Probably the situation may be different if they were not education majors, or if they are not from a specialized university. Of course there is a dearth of literature in this area of study (with specific reference to Nigeria) and this has made comparison with previous studies impossible.

Secondly, gender was not a significant predictor of CA among in-service teachers. This could have been accounted for by the fact that both sexes have been exposed the same training and opportunity therefore it is only logical to assert that sufficient impact has been on the two sexes that there is no significant difference in their CA. The situation may however be different probably if participants have not been exposed to the same kind of training within the same study environment.

Same explanation goes for the third hypothesis that revealed that there was no significance difference between the old and the young students on CA. It thus indicates that CA among in-service teachers is not really a matter of age.

Conclusion

The present study set out to investigate CA among in-service teachers in a university of education in Nigeria and also examined the differences that exist between the students' CA based on their age and gender. Result showed that in-service teachers are not significantly high on CA and that no significant difference existed within the participants based on their age or gender. Despite these results, it is worthy of note to mention that there are some obvious limitations in this study. The small sample size as well as the purposive sampling from a specialized university may have informed the findings of the study. Probably if a larger sample had been drawn from different institutions the result will be different.

An exploration of other variables such as, psychological and social variables and not only demographic variables may give a more discriminating result with regard to CA among undergraduates.

Subsequent studies in this area of research can therefore look at a larger sample that is drawn from different institutions and more variables other than demographics could also be explored.

Table 1.

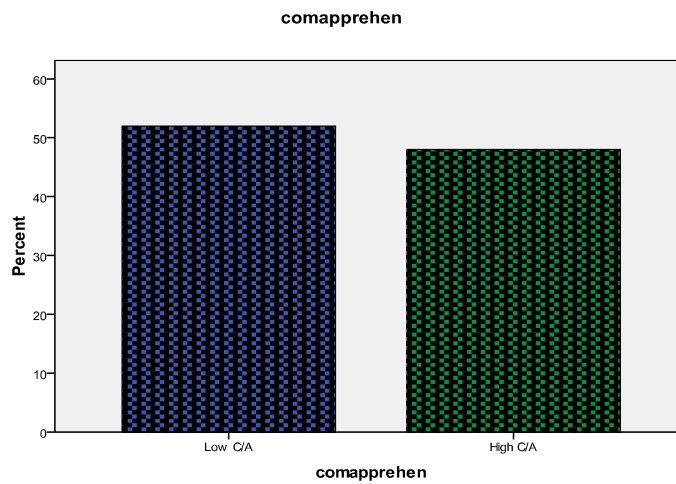


Table 2: Summary of t-test of independent samples showing the difference between male and female in-service teachers on Communication Apprehension.

Group Statistics						Df	t	P
	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean			
Communication Apprehension	Male	35	67.17	13.087	2.212	98	-.53	>.05
	Female	65	68.57	11.135	1.381			

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 3: Summary of t-test of independent samples showing the difference between Young and Old in-service teachers on Communication Apprehension.

Group Statistics						Df	t	P
	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean			
Communication Apprehension	Young	27	70.56	11.45	2.20	98	1.27	>.05
	Old	73	67.16	11.88	1.39			

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

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