Journal of Second and Multiple Language Acquisition – JSMULA
Vol: 14 Issue: 2 1055-1075, 2026
ISSN:2147-9747

Socio-demographic factors and speaking self-efficacy of prospective language teachers in Nigeria: assessing employability readiness

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Received : 07.02.2026
Accepted : 03.07.2026
Published : 30.08.2026
DOI: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.22697548

Abstract

Over the years, there has been a global concern about the speaking self-efficacy of aspiring language teachers, given that demonstrating confidence in speaking proficiency is essential to their profession and could also affect their employability readiness. This present study therefore investigated the speaking self-efficacy of prospective language teachers of French, Chinese, and German in Nigeria and the influence that their socio-demographic factors (age, gender and year of study) could have on their speaking self-efficacy. The sample size comprised 278 third language learners (French n=148; Chinese n=78; German n=52). Data obtained were subjected to t-test statistics, multiple regression and ANOVA. Findings revealed that the speaking self-efficacy beliefs of French, Chinese and German prospective language teachers, appear similar irrespective of their target language, though significant differences occurred only on beliefs that have to do with the capacity to concentrate while speaking in a foreign language. Further findings revealed that socio-demographic variables (age, gender and year of study) either individually or collectively did not significantly predict speaking self-efficacy across any of the language groups. However, item-level analyses showed that age, gender and year of study made limited and inconsistent impacts only on some specific speaking self-efficacy items. It was therefore concluded that speaking self-efficacy of prospective language teachers may be more strongly influenced by other psychological, experiential or instructional factors than by basic socio-demographic characteristics. The educational implications of the study were also highlighted.

Keywords: prospective third language teachers, French, German, Chinese, self-efficacy, socio-demographic variables

1. Introduction

Language learners in Nigeria who pursue full-fledged degrees in foreign languages such as French, Chinese and German at the university level are not only being trained to become proficient in their target languages, but are often prepared to become prospective language teachers (PLTs) (Edung, 2020). This is given the growing demand for certified and proficient foreign language instructors in most Nigerian primary and secondary schools, universities, and language institutes (Iwuchukwu, 2021). However, a number of studies has revealed that many prospective language teachers of French, Chinese and

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German in Nigeria tend to struggle a lot with speaking proficiently and confidently in their target languages (Inegbe, 2020; Osawaru & Gbenedio, 2020). This could be due to limited exposure of the prospective language teachers to the native speakers of their target languages, and also due to insufficient practice opportunities, and anxiety about pronunciation and fluency (Akuneme & Nwosu, 2021; Aliyu, Korau & Basiru, 2019). Evidence has also shown that lack of confidence in the speaking skill can impact the PLTs' ability to communicate effectively in their target languages and could also lower their speaking self-efficacy (Ahsan, Asgher & Hussain, 2020).

Speaking self-efficacy simply refers to the belief an individual has about his capability to speak fluently and effectively in a target language (Hermagustiana, Astuti & Sucahyo, 2021; Leeming, 2017). For prospective language teachers, their beliefs in their own capabilities to successfully engage in speaking tasks could be either high or low. It is believed however that possessing high speaking self-efficacy beliefs is very crucial for PLTs because having high self-efficacy in the speaking skill can foster better teaching performance, boost confidence and also enhance classroom engagement (Darmawan & Nirma, 2021; Sumarsono, Muliani & Bagis, 2020). Low speaking self-efficacy, on the other hand, can lower the PLTs' professional confidence, make them reluctant to participate in communicative tasks, and can also negatively impact the PLTs' employability readiness to work in a labor market that is increasingly competitive and prioritizes communication skills (Khan, Ahmad & Shah, 2019; Wyatt, 2018). In other words, poor speaking self-efficacy not only hinders effective communication but can also weaken employability readiness because prospective language teachers who lack confidence in their oral fluency are more likely to find it difficult to communicate in the classroom, at job interviews, and also in everyday situations. Considering also that most employers would often prefer to hire language teachers who can confidently and fluently communicate in their target language (Kiczkowiak, 2020), it has become pertinent therefore to address the issue of poor speaking self-efficacy among prospective language teachers in order to ensure that Nigeria's PLTs are well-prepared to handle the demands of their profession.

Granted is the fact that studies both in Nigeria and abroad have extensively examined some linguistic and psychological factors contributing to poor speaking self-efficacy among PLTs, and have also identified some of the factors to include anxiety in communicative situations, limited exposure to target languages, lack of exposure to oral activities, and insufficient pedagogical support (Aliyu, Korau & Basiru, 2019). However, there remains a significant gap in examining how socio-demographic factors (age, gender and year of study) specifically influence speaking self-efficacy among prospective language teachers of French, Chinese, and German in Nigeria. Furthermore, the need to investigate socio-demographic factors as a potential contributory factor to prospective language teachers' speaking self-efficacy is informed by Amiri & El Karfa's (2021) assertion which suggests that foreign language learning occurs within a social and cultural context, therefore emphasizing the role of socio-demographic factors in shaping linguistic proficiency. Seyedi-Andi et. al. (2019) also emphasized that self-efficacy beliefs are context-

dependent and can be influenced by personal and social factors amongst which may include age, gender and year of study.

1.1 Age and Speaking Self-Efficacy

Taking age into consideration, there is a possibility that age could be a significant determinant of speaking self-efficacy among prospective language teachers. According to Kupis et. al. (2021), age is commonly linked with cognitive flexibility, life experiences, learning adaptability, and linguistic confidence, all of which can influence teaching practices and how one perceives their own abilities**.** Over the years, studies that have investigated the influence of age on teacher self-efficacy have shown conflicting results (Geeraerts, Tynjälä & Heikkinen, 2018; Karimi & Norouzi, 2019; Kralova & Tirpakova, 2019; Ozkara, 2019). Karimi and Norouzi (2019) and Kralova and Tirpakova (2019) for instance found that younger language teachers tend to display greater confidence in spontaneous speech, as well as better adaptability and desire to engage in spoken conversation, whereas older language teachers tend to rely more on structured linguistic knowledge and discourse. Other researchers have argued that age is a reflection of accumulated experience, cognitive development, and exposure to language use, demonstrating that older language teachers may have more life experiences that bolster their confidence, while younger language teachers might rely more on recent training and flexibility (Geeraerts, Tynjälä & Heikkinen, 2018; Ozkara, 2019). These conflicting findings necessitate an investigation into how age could contribute to the speaking self-efficacy of prospective language teachers in Nigeria.

1.2 Gender and Speaking Self-Efficacy

Gender is another socio-demographic variable of interest that would be considered in this study. When it comes to studying a particular course at the university level in Nigeria, being male or female is associated with socially determined roles, expectations, attitudes, and different confidence levels (Attoh et al., 2019). For example, studying science courses such as Engineering and Medicine are considered more suitable for the males while learning languages may be considered more suitable for the females (Onile-Ere, Efekemo & Eni, 2021). It is possible that these differences in gender roles and expectations may equally play a role in explaining the speaking self-efficacy among prospective language teachers. Additionally, previous research also suggest that gender could play a pivotal role in shaping individuals' confidence in their speaking abilities, with some studies indicating that male and female language teachers may exhibit differing levels of speaking self-efficacy (Hayran, 2020). For instance, Chin (2021) and Namaziandost and Çakmak (2020) in their studies found that female learners reported higher speaking self-efficacy than their male counterparts. This finding implies that female prospective language teachers may feel more confident about engaging in speaking activities, which could translate to better performance in communicative language tasks. On the other hand, while Kuru (2018) found that males reported higher speaking self-efficacy than their female counterparts, some studies also revealed that gender did not significantly impact speaking performance (Alam & Nirma, 2021;

Demirel, Türkel & Aydın, 2020), suggesting that both male and female teachers exhibit comparable levels of speaking self-efficacy. This makes it pertinent to look more closely at how gender differences may actually manifest among prospective language teachers of French, Chinese, and German in Nigeria.

1.1. Year of Study and Speaking Self-Efficacy

Research also suggests that year of study could play a crucial role in understanding the speaking self-efficacy of prospective language teachers (Balcı, Şanal & Üğüten, 2019). In this present study, year of study reflects the cumulative learning experiences of the prospective language teachers as they move from one academic study year to another. Year of study also points to the academic level a student has attained in their educational journey, classifying them as either being at the beginner, intermediate, or finalist stages (Kahu, Picton & Nelson, 2020). In Nigeria, prospective language teachers of French, Chinese and German who are at the finalist stage of study can be said to have been exposed to extensive communicative experiences such as partaking in immersion programs abroad where they obtained the opportunity of communicating with the native speakers of their target languages (Ganiyu, 2019). Now, given that speaking self-efficacy evolves with experience, it is possible that the finalists may exhibit higher self-efficacy in their speaking skills due to extensive practice with the native speakers and prolonged exposure to oral activities in their target languages. Hoang and Wyatt (2021) also highlighted the evolving nature of self-efficacy beliefs among language teachers, suggesting that academic progression of the PLTs from one level of study to another might play a role in shaping their confidence.

1.2. Theoretical Framework

Theories such as the Self-Determination Theory, Willingness to Communicate (WTC) framework and Motivational Self System have been known in literature to contribute to the understanding of self-efficacy (Noels et al., 2020; Youvalari, 2021). Deci and Ryan (2000) explained that Self-Determination Theory emphasizes intrinsic and extrinsic motivation as key drivers of behavior in learning. MacIntyre's Willingness to Communicate (WTC) framework (2007) emphasizes situational variables affecting speaking confidence, with self-efficacy serving as a precursor to communication behavior (Saka & Merç, 2021). Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System (2009) connects self-efficacy to the ideal L2 self, positioning speaking confidence as central to language identity formation (Al-Hoorie, 2018). However, researchers are of the view that Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) appears more comprehensive in addressing the mechanisms of speaking self-efficacy, as it integrates cognitive, behavioral, and environmental factors influencing self-perception and performance (Abdullah, 2019). From the SCT perspective, speaking self-efficacy is viewed as a dynamic construct shaped by mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological states (Bandura, 1997). The theory emphasizes that successful past performances (mastery experiences) and observing others (vicarious modeling) significantly strengthen self-efficacy beliefs.

Researchers have further explored this framework, with Ocak & Olur (2018), validating scales that measure speaking self-efficacy and its sources, reinforcing Bandura's claims. However, despite its robustness, self-efficacy theory has demonstrated certain weaknesses, particularly in its ability to account for socio-cultural influences and external constraints that may hinder speaking confidence. Some researchers have called for more nuanced, context-specific investigations into how self-efficacy operates, particularly in diverse educational and cultural settings in order to address these concerns. While these theoretical concerns are partially understood, further empirical investigations particularly into socio-demographic factors such as age, gender, year of study could provide deeper insights into how external variables influence speaking self-efficacy among prospective language teachers

Literature is replete with studies that have explained general self-efficacy in language learning, however, speaking self-efficacy which is arguably the most critical skill for communicative competence has received limited scholarly attention. Also, most of the studies on teacher self-efficacy were focused on language teachers of English. Little is known about the speaking self-efficacy of prospective language teachers of French, Chinese and German. Meanwhile, understanding the speaking self-efficacy of the prospective language teachers of these less commonly taught foreign languages in Nigeria is very crucial in enhancing their employability readiness. The present study therefore addresses the paucity of research by examining the speaking self-efficacy of prospective language teachers of French, Chinese and German through the lenses of their socio-demographic profiles. Furthermore, given that French, Chinese and German languages are mostly learnt as third languages in Nigeria, this present study is also significant as it contributes to the limited empirical evidence on third language acquisition that will enable researchers to mount intervention programs that will serve as evidence-based treatment strategies for the third language learners of French, Chinese and German in Nigeria with poor speaking self-efficacy beliefs.

1.3. Research Questions

a. What are participants' mean scores on speaking self-efficacy?
b. Are there differences in participants' mean scores on speaking self-efficacy based on their age, gender, and year of study?
c. To what extent do age, gender, and year of study predict participants' speaking self-efficacy?

1.4. Research Hypotheses

a. Significant differences do not occur in participants' mean scores on speaking self-efficacy based on age, gender, and year of study.
b. Participants' age, gender and year of study do not significantly predict their speaking self-efficacy.

2. Methods

2.1. *Research Design*

A quantitative research design was utilized in this study. According to Schutt (2019), quantitative research design is suitable for a study that allows

researchers to collect numerical data and use statistical methods to examine differences and relationships among variables. The researchers sought to ascertain the mean responses of prospective language teachers on speaking self-efficacy with the aim of investigating if significant differences would occur in their speaking self-efficacy as a result of socio-demographic variables (gender, age and year of study). Furthermore, how socio-demographic variables predicted speaking self-efficacy was also investigated in the study

2.2. Population, Sample and Sampling Technique

The population of the study comprised all the 451 French, Chinese and German language students (French n=241; Chinese n= 121 and German n= 89) during the 2020/2021 academic session from two Federal universities located in the Southeastern geo-political zone of Nigeria. The two Federal universities namely; Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka and University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Enugu State were the only Federal universities offering French, Chinese and German Languages as full-fledged academic courses in South-East, Nigeria. Copies of the questionnaires were sent to all of the 451 respondents electronically, but only 278 respondents (French n=148; Chinese n= 78 and German n= 52) gave their consent and responded, thus constituting the sample size for this study. In other words, convenience sampling technique was used in which only those who volunteered participated in the study.

2.3. Instruments

To measure the speaking self-efficacy of prospective language teachers, an adaptation of Self-Efficacy Scale developed by Idrus, Salleh and Abdullah (2011) was used. The questionnaire was divided into two sections; the first section collected the demographic information of the respondents in three sub-categories; gender, age and year of study. The second section of the questionnaire measured the perceived speaking self-efficacy of prospective language teachers. It comprised of 9 items structured into a 4 point-rating scale (ranging from 4 = strongly agree to 1 = strongly disagree). These items were revalidated by experts in Measurement and Evaluation and Educational Psychology in Nigeria. The internal consistencies of the instrument was determined using Cronbach's alpha and was found to have values of .81; .64 and .86 for French, Chinese and German subsamples respectively.

2.4. *Procedure*

The researcher distributed the questionnaires electronically using Google forms. Instructions were written on the online survey to guide the respondents on how to fill the questionnaire, explaining to them the importance of the study and that their responses would be treated with utmost confidentiality. The online questionnaires were filled and responses received electronically within a period of one month from 19th May, 2021 to 19th June, 2021.

2.5. Data Analysis

The data collected were entered into the IBM-SPSS version 28. Mean and standard deviation (*SD*), t-test, ANOVA, and multiple regression were used for data analysis. Statistical significance was tested at 0.05 level of significance. t-test and ANOVA were used to determine the significant differences in the

variables while multiple regression was used to determine if the predictor variables (gender, age and year of study) predicted the criterion variable (speaking self-efficacy).

2.6. Ethical Considerations

The participation in the study was purely voluntary. Informed consent was collected from all the participants. Participants were made aware that they could withdraw from the study at any point in time without facing any repercussions. The participants' information was kept confidential and anonymous throughout the study.

3. Findings

Table 1

Mean, SD and ANOVA Test of Prospective Language Teachers' Responses on Speaking Self-Efficacy

S/N	Items	French			Chinese			German			Significance test		
		N	*M*	*SD*	*N*	*M*	*SD*	*N*	*M*	*SD*	*F*	*sig*	**η²p**
1	I do a good job of participating in class discussion conducted fully in French/Chinese/German.	148	3.03	.72	78	3.13	.65	52	3.02	.70	.618	.540	-
2	I feel confident about my ability to speak French/Chinese/German fluently.	148	2.87	.73	78	2.90	.78	52	2.67	.79	1.584	.207	-
3	My speaking ability in French/Chinese/German does not worry me	148	2.30	.81	78	2.45	.91	52	2.06	.67	3.585	.029	.025
4	I do not think I am good at speaking in French/Chinese/German.	148	2.35	.81	78	2.23	.82	52	2.23	.61	.740	.478	-
5	I have problem speaking in French/Chinese/German when I should.	148	2.06	.81	78	2.22	.83	52	1.98	.64	1.630	.198	-
6	I can speak in French/Chinese/German with my French lecturers	148	2.68	.81	78	2.73	.88	52	2.46	.75	1.826	.163	-
7	When I decide to say something in French/Chinese/German, I just go ahead and do it.	148	2.67	.77	78	2.77	.79	52	2.50	.73	1.927	.148	-
8	It is difficult for me to concentrate while speaking in French/Chinese/German with others.	148	2.31	.77	78	2.54	.82	52	2.54	.67	3.044	.049	.022
9	I am not able to use new French/Chinese/German words in my conversation easily.	148	2.13	.80	78	2.28	.77	52	2.23	.68	1.100	.334	-

Table 1 shows the mean scores, standard deviation and ANOVA test results comparing the speaking self-efficacy of prospective language teachers of French, Chinese, and German languages across nine items. The results of the ANOVA test reveal statistically significant differences in only two items; item 3 ($F = 3.585$, $p = .029$, $\eta^2p = .025$) and item 8 ($F = 3.044$, $p = .049$, $\eta^2p = .022$) respectively. For other items, no statistically significant differences were found across the three languages. Regarding item 3 (My speaking ability in French/Chinese/German does not worry me), Chinese prospective teachers ($M = 2.45$, $SD = .91$) had significant higher mean score than French prospective teachers ($M = 2.30$, $SD = .81$) and German prospective teachers ($M = 2.06$, $SD = .67$). The small effect size ($\eta^2p = .025$) suggests a weak but notable difference. For item 8 (It is difficult for me to concentrate while speaking in French/Chinese/German with others), results showed that Chinese and German prospective teachers had significant higher scores (Chinese: *M*=2.54,

SD= .82; German: *M*=2.54, *SD*= .67) than French third prospective teachers (*M*= 2.31, *SD*= .77), though the effect size was minimal.

Table 2
Mean, SD and Significant Test of Prospective Language Teachers' Responses on Speaking Self-Efficacy based on Age

S/N	Items	Age Range (18-22)			Age Range (23 and above)			Significance test		
		N	*M*	*SD*	*N*	*M*	*SD*	*T*	*Sig*	**η^2p**
	French									
1	I do a good job of participating in class discussion conducted fully in French.	79	2.90	.71	69	3.17	.71	-2.360	.020	-.389
2	I feel confident about my ability to speak French fluently.	79	2.86	.75	69	2.87	.71	-.073	.942	-
3	My speaking ability in French does not worry me	79	2.25	.81	69	2.35	.82	-.706	.481	-
4	I do not think I am good at speaking in French.	79	2.28	.83	69	2.42	.78	-1.069	.143	-
5	I have problem speaking in French when I should.	79	1.98	.85	69	2.16	.76	-1.388	.084	-
6	I can speak in French with my French lecturers	79	2.62	.76	69	2.74	.87	-.890	.184	-
7	When I decide to say something in French, I just go ahead and do it.	79	2.68	.76	69	2.65	.78	.247	.806	-
8	It is difficult for me to concentrate while speaking in French/Chinese/German with others.	79	2.32	.78	69	2.30	.77	.095	.925	-
9	I am not able to use new French words in my conversation easily.	79	2.17	.85	69	2.09	.74	.586	.559	-
	Chinese									
1	I do a good job of participating in class discussion conducted fully in Chinese.	42	3.14	.65	36	3.11	.67	.213	.832	-
2	I feel confident about my ability to speak Chinese fluently.	42	2.83	.76	36	2.97	.81	-.779	.441	-
3	My speaking ability in Chinese does not worry me	42	2.33	.82	36	2.58	1.00	-1.218	.227	-
4	I do not think I am good at speaking in Chinese.	42	2.12	.80	36	2.36	.83	-1.305	.343	-
5	I have problem speaking in Chinese when I should.	42	2.14	.75	36	2.31	.92	-.860	.340	-
6	I can speak in Chinese with my Chinese lecturers	42	2.64	.91	36	2.83	.85	-.955	.930	-
7	When I decide to say something in Chinese, I just go ahead and do it.	42	2.76	.76	36	2.78	.83	-.088	.931	-
8	It is difficult for me to concentrate while speaking in Chinese with others.	42	2.38	.85	36	2.72	.74	-1.869	.065	-
9	I am not able to use new Chinese words in my conversation easily.	42	2.17	.76	36	2.42	.77	-1.437	.155	-

	German									
1	I do a good job of participating in class discussion conducted fully in German.	34	3.00	.82	18	3.06	.42	-.270	.788	-
2	I feel confident about my ability to speak German fluently.	34	2.62	.89	18	2.78	.55	-.696	.490	-
3	My speaking ability in German does not worry me	34	2.06	.69	18	2.06	.64	.017	.987	-
4	I do not think I am good at speaking in German.	34	2.24	.61	18	2.22	.65	.072	.943	-
5	I have problem speaking in German when I should.	34	1.94	.65	18	2.06	.64	-.608	.546	-
6	I can speak in German with my German lecturers	34	2.38	.78	18	2.61	.70	-1.043	.302	-
7	When I decide to say something in German, I just go ahead and do it.	34	2.56	.79	18	2.39	.61	.798	.428	-
8	It is difficult for me to concentrate while speaking in German with others.	34	2.50	.71	18	2.61	.61	-.565	.575	-
9	I am not able to use new German words in my conversation easily.	34	2.27	.75	18	2.17	.52	.495	.623	-

Table 2 shows the independent samples t-test results comparing the speaking self-efficacy of prospective French, Chinese, and German language teachers based on two age groups: 18-22 years and 23 years and above, across nine items. Results showed that for prospective French language teachers, a statistically significant difference was found for item 1 (I do a good job of participating in class discussion conducted fully in French) ($t(146)=-2.360$, $p=.020$, $\eta^2p = -.389$), with older participants ($M = 3.17$, $SD = .71$) showing higher significant mean scores than younger participants ($M = 2.90$, $SD = .71$). This item 1 also demonstrates a moderate negative effect size ($\eta^2p = -.389$). However, for the remaining eight items related to French speaking self-efficacy, no statistically significant differences were observed between the two age groups ($p>.05$). Results further showed that for prospective Chinese and German language teachers, no statistically significant differences ($p>.05$) were found between the two age groups on any of the nine items measuring speaking self-efficacy.

Table 3

Mean, SD and Significant Test of Language Students' Responses on Speaking Self-Efficacy based on Gender

S/N	Items	Male			Female			Significance test		
		N	*M*	*SD*	*N*	*M*	*SD*	*T*	*sig*	**η^2p**
	French									
1	I do a good job of participating in class discussion conducted fully in French.	18	3.00	.77	130	3.03	.72	-.170	.865	-
2	I feel confident about my ability to speak French fluently.	18	2.72	.67	130	2.89	.73	-.890	.375	-
3	My speaking ability in French does not worry me	18	2.22	1.06	130	2.31	.78	-.417	.677	-
4	I do not think I am good at speaking in French.	18	2.22	.81	130	2.36	.81	-.686	.494	-
5	I have problem speaking in French when I should.	18	2.33	.97	130	2.02	.78	1.530	.128	-
6	I can speak in French with my French lecturers	18	2.67	.97	130	2.68	.79	-.050	.960	-

7	When I decide to say something in French, I just go ahead and do it.	18	2.50	.92	130	2.69	.75	-.995	.321	-
8	It is difficult for me to concentrate while speaking in French/Chinese/German with others.	18	2.39	.78	130	2.30	.77	.456	.649	-
9	I am not able to use new French words in my conversation easily.	18	2.11	.90	130	2.13	.79	-.097	.923	-
	Chinese									
1	I do a good job of participating in class discussion conducted fully in Chinese.	29	3.17	.66	49	3.10	.65	.458	.648	-
2	I feel confident about my ability to speak Chinese fluently.	29	3.10	.72	49	2.78	.80	1.815	.074	-
3	My speaking ability in Chinese does not worry me	29	2.76	.87	49	2.27	.89	2.393	.019	.561
4	I do not think I am good at speaking in Chinese.	29	2.35	.77	49	2.16	.85	.944	.348	-
5	I have problem speaking in Chinese when I should.	29	2.48	.87	49	2.06	.78	2.217	.030	.385
6	I can speak in Chinese with my Chinese lecturers	29	2.97	.82	49	2.59	.89	1.845	069	-
7	When I decide to say something in Chinese, I just go ahead and do it.	29	3.00	.85	49	2.63	.73	2.029	.046	-.250
8	It is difficult for me to concentrate while speaking in Chinese with others.	29	2.55	.74	49	2.53	.87	.110	.913	-
9	I am not able to use new Chinese words in my conversation easily.	29	2.24	.83	49	2.31	.74	-.356	.723	-
	German									
1	I do a good job of participating in class discussion conducted fully in German.	8	2.75	.71	44	3.07	.70	-1.188	.241	-
2	I feel confident about my ability to speak German fluently.	8	2.88	.99	44	2.64	.75	.788	.435	-
3	My speaking ability in German does not worry me	8	2.00	.93	44	2.07	.63	-.263	.794	-
4	I do not think I am good at speaking in German.	8	2.38	.52	44	2.21	.63	.719	.476	-
5	I have problem speaking in German when I should.	8	1.88	.35	44	2.00	.68	-.503	.617	-
6	I can speak in German with my German lecturers	8	2.50	.76	44	2.46	.76	.156	.877	-
7	When I decide to say something in German, I just go ahead and do it.	8	2.63	.74	44	2.48	.73	.524	.602	-
8	It is difficult for me to concentrate while speaking in German with others.	8	2.50	.53	44	2.55	.70	-.175	.862	-
9	I am not able to use new German words in my conversation easily.	8	2.38	.52	44	2.21	.70	.653	.516	-

Results in Table 3 assessed the speaking self-efficacy of French, Chinese and German prospective language teachers in Nigeria based on gender. It revealed that for French and German prospective language teachers' groups, no significant gender differences were found across all the nine speaking self-efficacy items (p>.05). However, in the Chinese language group, significant gender differences were observed on three items; items 3, 5 and 7. For item 3 (my speaking ability in Chinese language does not worry me), male Chinese students had significant higher mean score (M= 2.76, SD= .87) than the female Chinese prospective language teachers (M= 2.27, SD= .89), t=2.393, p< .05). For item 5 (I have problem speaking in Chinese language when I should), male Chinese prospective language teachers also had significant higher mean scores on the item (M= 2.48, SD= .87) than their female counterparts (M= 2.06, SD= .78), t= 2.217, p<. 05, and in item 7 (When I decide to say something in Chinese language, I just go ahead and do it), results also showed that male Chinese prospective language teachers had significant higher mean scores on the item (M= 3.00, SD= .85) than their female counterparts (M= 2.63, SD= .73), t= 2.029, p<. 05.

Table 4

Mean, SD and Significant Test of Language Students' Responses on Speaking Self-Efficacy based on School Level

S/N	Items	Yr. 1			Yr. 2			Yr. 3			Yr. 4			Significance test		
		N	*M*	*SD*	*N*	*M*	*SD*	*N*	*M*	*SD*	*N*	*M*	*SD*	*F*	*sig*	**η^2p**
	French															
1	I do a good job of participating in class discussion conducted fully in French.	16	2.88	.72	54	3.00	.70	09	2.78	.83	69	3.15	.71	1.372	.254	-
2	I feel confident about my ability to speak French fluently.	16	2.94	.77	54	2.87	.75	09	2.78	.83	69	2.86	.69	.100	.960	-
3	My speaking ability in French does not worry me	16	2.13	.72	54	2.32	.80	09	2.11	.60	69	2.35	.87	.490	.690	-
4	I do not think I am good at speaking in French.	16	2.31	.83	54	2.33	.73	09	2.00	.71	69	2.41	.86	.689	.560	-
5	I have problem speaking in French when I should.	16	1.88	.81	54	1.89	.77	09	1.89	.87	69	2.26	.83	2.722	.047	.054
6	I can speak in French with my French lecturers	16	2.56	.89	54	2.56	.89	09	2.67	.60	69	2.88	.81	3.235	.024	.063
7	When I decide to say something in French, I just go ahead and do it.	16	2.82	.66	54	2.81	.66	09	2.78	.67	69	2.77	.81	1.726	.164	-
8	It is difficult for me to concentrate while speaking in French/Chinese/German with others.	16	2.44	.63	54	2.44	.63	09	2.22	.44	69	2.38	.88	.693	.558	-
9	I am not able to use new French words in my conversation easily.	16	2.19	.75	54	2.19	.75	09	2.11	.60	69	2.17	.80	.249	.862	-
	Chinese															
1	I do a good job of participating in class discussion conducted fully in Chinese.	19	3.05	.62	16	3.11	.81	24	3.25	.68	78	3.13	.54	.271	.846	-
2	I feel confident about my ability to speak Chinese fluently.	19	2.79	.79	16	2.74	.73	24	3.19	.83	78	2.92	.78	1.130	.343	-
3	My speaking ability in Chinese does not worry me	19	2.42	.84	16	2.32	.75	24	2.56	1.15	78	2.50	.93	.244	.865	-
4	I do not think I am good at speaking in Chinese.	19	2.16	.69	16	1.95	.85	24	2.69	.79	78	2.21	.83	2.619	.057	-
5	I have problem speaking in Chinese when I should.	19	2.16	.76	16	1.95	.78	24	2.56	1.03	78	1.95	.78	1.672	.180	-
6	I can speak in Chinese with my Chinese lecturers	19	2.21	.79	16	2.47	.84	24	3.31	.70	78	2.96	.81	6.957	<.001	.220
7	When I decide to say something in Chinese, I just go ahead and do it.	19	2.63	.68	16	2.68	.82	24	3.00	.82	78	2.79	.83	.722	.542	-
8	It is difficult for me to concentrate while speaking in Chinese with others.	19	2.37	.76	16	2.42	.96	24	2.88	.81	78	2.54	.72	1.327	.272	-
9	I am not able to use new Chinese words in my conversation easily.	19	2.00	.67	16	2.16	.76	24	2.50	.89	78	2.46	.72	1.922	.133	-

	German															
1	I do a good job of participating in class discussion conducted fully in German.	17	3.29	.59	13	2.85	.80	4	2.75	.96	18	2.94	.64	1.442	.242	-
2	I feel confident about my ability to speak German fluently.	17	3.12	.86	13	2.46	.78	4	2.50	.58	18	2.44	.62	3.027	.038	.159
3	My speaking ability in German does not worry me	17	2.06	.66	13	1.85	.80	4	1.85	.80	18	2.17	.61	.690	.563	-
4	I do not think I am good at speaking in German.	17	2.41	.62	13	2.08	.49	4	2.25	.96	18	2.17	.62	.822	.488	-
5	I have problem speaking in German when I should.	17	2.24	.56	13	1.62	.51	4	2.00	.82	18	2.00	.69	2.510	.070	-
6	I can speak in German with my German lecturers	17	2.41	.80	13	2.39	.65	4	2.50	1.00	18	2.56	.78	.159	.924	-
7	When I decide to say something in German, I just go ahead and do it.	17	2.77	.66	13	2.39	.77	4	2.25	.96	18	2.39	.70	1.168	.332	-
8	It is difficult for me to concentrate while speaking in German with others.	17	2.77	.75	13	2.39	.65	4	2.50	.58	18	2.44	.62	.996	.403	-
9	I am not able to use new German words in my conversation easily.	17	2.59	.80	13	2.00	.58	4	2.25	.96	18	2.06	.42	2.761	.052	-

Table 4 shows the speaking self-efficacy of prospective language teachers based on their year of study (Year 1 to Year 4) for French, Chinese and German language groups. For French language group, significant differences across academic years were found on two items: items 5 and 6 respectively. Item 5 (I have problem speaking in my target language when I should) showed a significant difference in students' difficulty in speaking when required ($F = 2.722$, $p = .047$, $\eta^2p = .054$), with Year 4 students reporting more difficulties ($M = 2.26$, $SD = .83$) compared to those in lower years. Similarly, item 6 (I can speak in French language with my French lecturers) showed that the students' confidence increased significantly from Year 1 to Year 4 ($F = 3.235$, $p = .024$, $\eta^2p = .063$), with Year 4 students demonstrating higher confidence ($M = 2.88$, $SD = .81$) than students in earlier years.

In the Chinese language group, only Item 6 (I can speak in Chinese with my Chinese lecturers) revealed a significant difference across years ($F = 6.957$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2p = .220$), with Year 3 and Year 4 students reporting higher confidence to speak in Chinese with Chinese lecturers ($M = 3.31$, $SD = .70$; $M = 2.96$, $SD = .81$ respectively), than Years 1 and 2 students ($M = 2.47$, $SD = .84$; $M = 2.21$, $SD = .79$ respectively).

For German language group, Item 2 (I feel confident about my ability to speak German fluently) was the only item with a significant difference across school levels (F = 3.027, p = .038, η^2p = .159), with Year 1 students reporting higher confidence (M = 3.12, SD = .86) than other years.

Table 5

Multiple Regression Analysis for Predictor variables and Speaking Self-efficacy

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients B	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficient Beta	t	Sig
French 1 (Constant)	2.184	.290		7.517	.001
Age range	.025	.090	.025	.274	.784
Gender	.046	.125	.031	.369	.713
YOS	.062	.040	.143	1.579	.117
R	.156				
R^2	.024				
F	1.203				.311
Chinese 1 (Constant)	2.714	.385		7.054	.001
Age range	-.090	.187	-.065	-.482	.631
Gender	-.184	.163	-.129	-1.129	.263
YOS	.132	.080	.222	1.654	.102
R	.232				
R^2	.054				
F	1.407				.248
German 1 (Constant)	2.297	.417		5.512	.001
Age range	.190	.162	.193	1.175	.246
Gender	.068	.189	.052	.359	.721
YOS	-.110	.061	-.295	-1.796	.079
R	.255				
R^2	.065				
F	1.110				.354

a. Dependent variable: Speaking self-efficacy

Table 5 shows the multiple regression analysis conducted to predict the speaking self-efficacy of prospective language teachers of French, Chinese and German. For the French language group, multiple regression coefficient (R) was .156 and the R^2 was .024, indicating that the predictor variables jointly contributed 2.4% to explain the variances in response, though the corresponding F (3, 144) = 1.203, was not statistically significant (p>.05). Using standardized (*B*), Table 5 also revealed that none of the predictor

variables, age range (β = .025, *t* = .274, *p* > .05), gender (β = .031, *t* = .369, *p* > .05) or year of study (β = .143, *t* = 1.579, *p* > .05) made significant individual contribution to explain the speaking self-efficacy of French prospective language teachers.

For the Chinese language group, the model was not statistically significant (*F*(3, 143) = 1.407. *p*> .05), though it accounted for only 5.4% of the variance in speaking self-efficacy (R^2 = .054). Furthermore, using standardized (*B*), results revealed that none of the predictor variables made significant individual contribution to explain the speaking self-efficacy of Chinese prospective language teachers: age range (β = -.065, *t* = -.482, *p* > .05), gender (β = -.129, *t* = -1.129, *p* > .05), and year of study (β = .222, *t* = 1.654, *p* > .05).

For the German language group, the regression model was also not statistically significant (*F* (3, 48) = 1.110, *p*> .05). The R^2 was .065 indicating that the predictor variables jointly contributed 6.5% to explain the variances in speaking self-efficacy. Using standardized (*B*), Table 5 also revealed that the speaking self-efficacy of German prospective language teachers was not significantly explained by any of the predictor variables individually: age range (β = .193, *t* = 1.175, *p* > .05), gender (β = .052, *t* = .359, *p* > .05), and year of study (study β = -.295, *t* = -1.796, *p* > .05), although year of study showed a negative relationship.

4. Discussion

This present study investigated the socio-demographic variables influencing the speaking self-efficacy of prospective language teachers of French, Chinese, and German in Nigeria across nine self-efficacy items. A number of findings emerged giving us insight on socio-demographic factors that may account for differences in the speaking self-efficacy of prospective language teachers. Preliminary findings showed that the respondents, regardless of their target language, revealed moderate speaking self-efficacy scores across all the language groups, indicating a common baseline of confidence about their speaking ability. This is an indication that the perception of speaking self-efficacy beliefs across the three language groups were largely similar, with minor variations. Their responses only differed significantly on items 3 and 8 which have to do with the capacity to focus on speaking tasks. For instance, in item 3 (my speaking ability in French/Chinese/German does not worry me), Chinese prospective language teachers had significant higher mean score on this item, followed by French prospective language teachers, and then German prospective language teachers respectively. This implies that Chinese prospective language teachers have stronger self-efficacy about their speaking ability than the French and German prospective language teachers. However, the observed differences in this item 3, where Chinese prospective teachers expressed less worry about their speaking ability, partially contradicts the findings of Inegbe (2020) and Khan, Ahmad and Shah (2019) which found that many prospective language teachers of Chinese, French and German in Nigeria tend to struggle a lot with speaking proficiently and confidently in their target languages. It could be however that the Chinese prospective language teachers in Nigeria might be benefiting from more focused language training environments that foster their

communicative confidence as to compared to their French and German counterparts. Also, as regards item 8 (It is difficult for me to concentrate while speaking in French/Chinese/German with others), results showed that Chinese and German prospective language teachers had significantly higher mean scores than French prospective language teachers. What this implies is that the Chinese and German prospective language teachers reported greater difficulty concentrating while speaking than do their French counterparts, though with minimal effect sizes. The increased difficulty in concentration reported by Chinese and German prospective language teachers may be connected to the strong anxiety they experience when processing less familiar language structures, as noted in Akuneme and Nwosu's (2021) and Aliyu, Korau and Basiru's (2019) findings which emphasized that anxiety can impact a learner's ability to concentrate and communicate effectively in a foreign language.

Taking age into consideration, results revealed that age was a significant factor influencing speaking self-efficacy among prospective French language teachers on one specific item; item 1 (I do a good job of participating in class discussion conducted fully in French language). On this particular item 1, older French participants (23 years and above) reported significantly higher self-efficacy compared to their younger counterparts (18–22 years), with a moderate negative effect size. However, no significant age-related differences were observed in the remaining eight items for French, nor across all items for Chinese and German prospective language teachers. This result is consistent with the finding of Ozkara (2019) which found that older prospective language teachers exhibited higher speaking self-efficacy due to accumulated life experiences that bolster their confidence. Similarly, Geeraerts, Tynjälä and Heikkinen (2018) affirmed that age is a reflection of accumulated experience and that older language teachers often possess higher confidence in oral language use, likely due to increased cognitive maturity and communicative exposure. Looking at these findings, it could be that age and accumulated language experience are more likely to enhance language students' confidence in classroom participation, particularly in languages like French that have intricate grammatical structures. In other words, self-efficacy tends to increase with age and experience due to greater exposure and mastery experiences.

Considering the impact of gender on the speaking self-efficacy of prospective language teachers, findings from this study revealed that gender differences in speaking self-efficacy were significant only among prospective language teachers of Chinese, with male Chinese prospective language teachers reporting higher self-efficacy than females on three items; items 3 (my speaking ability in Chinese language does not worry me); 5 (I have problem speaking in Chinese language when I should); and 7 (When I decide to say something in Chinese language, I just go ahead and do it). These items are related to their confidence in speaking ability, difficulty speaking when required, and willingness to speak spontaneously. These findings align with the study by Kuru (2018) that found that males reported higher speaking self-efficacy than their female counterparts. Conversely, these results contrast with studies by Chin (2021) and Namaziandost and Çakmak (2020) that found that female language teachers frequently showed higher speaking self-efficacy

compared to their male counterparts, attributing this to social conditioning and perceived linguistic competence. In addition, further findings revealed that no significant gender differences were found among prospective French and German language teachers across all nine items. This is in line with some studies that revealed that gender did not significantly impact speaking performance (Demirel, Türkel & Aydın, 2020), suggesting that both male and female teachers exhibit comparable levels of speaking self-efficacy. However, while gender does not appear to influence speaking self-efficacy in French and German prospective teachers, its effect among Chinese prospective language teachers suggests a need for gender-responsive strategies to support Chinese female learners' communicative confidence and engagement in language classrooms.

Our findings on the impact of year of study on speaking self-efficacy of prospective language teachers revealed significant differences across academic years for specific items within each language group. In the French language group, Year 4 students reported greater difficulty speaking French when required (Item 5), and yet exhibited increased confidence in speaking French with French lecturers (Item 6). For Chinese language group, Year 3 and Year 4 students demonstrated higher confidence in speaking with Chinese lecturers (Item 6) compared to their counterparts in Years 1 and 2. Conversely, in the German language group, Year 1 students exhibited the highest confidence in their ability to speak fluently (Item 2), compared to those the in upper years. The increased speaking difficulty reported by Year 4 French students and the decline in fluency confidence among German students in higher years contradict the findings by Ganiyu (2019) that students in their final years of study demonstrated stronger speaking self-efficacy, likely due to increased exposure to language practice and instructional strategies. Also, the increasing confidence seen in higher-level French and Chinese students when interacting with their lecturers is also supported by previous research such as that of Hoang and Wyatt (2021) who argued that the academic progression of language learners from one level of study to another might play a role in shaping their confidence. Furthermore, the early overconfidence of German Year 1 students may be the result of exaggerated initial self-perceptions that haven't yet been put to the test by challenging German communication tasks.

The multiple regression analyses conducted for French, Chinese, and German language groups revealed that socio-demographic variables (age, gender, and year of study) neither made significant individual contribution to explain the speaking self-efficacy of French, Chinese and German prospective language teachers, nor did they jointly predict speaking self-efficacy when the items are summed together. These findings demonstrate the poor predictive power of sociodemographic factors for speaking self-efficacy, and are also consistent with the work of Aliyu, Korau and Basiru (2019) who reported that self-efficacy beliefs in educational settings are often more strongly influenced by psychological factors such as anxiety and motivation. Similarly, Abdullah (2019) found that factors such as personal motivation, mastery experiences, feedback, learning environment may play more critical roles in shaping speaking confidence than age, gender, or year of study alone. This therefore highlights the need to explore non-demographic predictors, such as anxiety,

learning strategies, or teacher support, to better understand speaking self-efficacy among prospective language teachers of French, Chinese and German in multilingual teacher education contexts.

5. Conclusions

This study examined the influence of socio-demographic factors (age, gender and year of study) on the speaking self-efficacy of prospective language teachers of French, Chinese, and German in Nigeria, with implications for their employability readiness. The findings revealed that age, gender, and year of study had limited and inconsistent impact on the speaking self-efficacy of prospective French, Chinese, and German language teachers in Nigeria. Furthermore, the item-level analyses showed that age and gender differences were observed in some specific items within the French and Chinese language groups respectively, and some variations were also noted across academic levels, particularly in interactions with lecturers. Furthermore, multiple regression analysis consistently showed that socio-demographic variables (age, gender and year of study), either individually or collectively, did not significantly predict speaking self-efficacy across any of the language groups. It is therefore concluded that speaking self-efficacy, which is a pivotal component of employability readiness for prospective language teachers of French, Chinese and German, may be more strongly influenced by other psychological, experiential or instructional or factors than by basic socio-demographic characteristics.

The findings of this study also have significant implications for language curriculum designers and language teacher education. Given that socio-demographic variables showed minimal predictive power, curriculum designers and educators should incorporate more psychological and contextual factors, including anxiety reduction strategies, immersive learning experiences, and mentor-supported speaking opportunities to strengthen prospective language teachers' speaking self-efficacy and readiness for real-world communication demands. These steps would better prepare the prospective language teachers of French, Chinese and German with the communication confidence and language skills required for employment in Nigeria's multilingual education sector.

Notwithstanding the fact that our study has made significant contributions, some limitations exist that may affect the generalizability of results. First, the study was limited to a specific institutional setting, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other educational contexts or geographic regions in Nigeria. Second, the male prospective language teachers are greatly outnumbered by the female respondents by more than 80%, which can result in significant gender bias. This could be explained from the point that in Nigeria, the departments of foreign languages are comprised more of females than males. Another limitation is that we employed only a quantitative design. There is need that the future studies are triangulated for more robust findings.

Author contribution statement:
Chioma Christiana Akuneme developed and designed the study, conducted the literature review, collected the data, interpreted the findings, and wrote and revised the manuscript.
Kingsley Chinaza Nwosu performed the statistical analysis of the data.
GenAI usage statement: GENAI was used to enhance the writing.

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