# INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION COMPETENCY IN MULTIETHNIC CHURCH COMMUNITY

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**ABSTRACT:** *Intercultural communication has become inevitable due to the globalization concept that characterizes communities, societies, and churches today. The need for intercultural communication competency in the church communities has become unavoidable because of global citizenship, cultural sensitivity and diversities, trans-cultural communication appropriateness, intercultural communication effectiveness, and cross-cultural adjustment. This paper intends to determine the benefits of Intercultural Communication Competency in managing a Multiethnic Church Community. Through a qualitative approach, the paper explores the concepts of Communication, Intercultural Communication, Intercultural Communication Competency, and Multiethnic Churches. It highlights the benefits of Intercultural Communication Competency for managing Multiethnic Church Communities. This writer believes that competency in intercultural communication will help individuals understand personal communication skills and appreciate that of others, help others understand cultural variations in language use, information will be clear and precise, and knowledge of other cultures will be developed. There will be understanding for proper adaptation while dignity and respect will be enhanced, demonstrating a positive regard for each other and thus appreciating one another.*

**KEYWORDS**: Communication, Intercultural Communication, Intercultural Communication Competency, Management, Multiethnic Church.

## INTRODUCTION

Communication is the lifeblood of any institution, corporate firm or government establishment, Church or faith-based organization, and communication competency is obligatory as the essence of human life; if communication between organizations fail or become defective, the entire system will take a nosedive (Havrilova et al., 2021). Intercultural Communication has become inevitable due to globalization, the concept that characterizes communities, societies and churches today. The need for intercultural communication competency in church communities has become unavoidable because of global citizenship, cultural sensitivity and diversities, trans-cultural communication appropriateness, intercultural communication effectiveness, and cross-cultural adjustment (Sherwood & Russell-Mundine, 2017).

It is noteworthy that the church leadership needs to embark on a mission to ensure clarity, orderliness, and self-control in the household of God, which comprises different people from different backgrounds and cultural dispositions. This concept defines the multiethnic church. Therefore, communication and competence in intercultural communication address the complex abilities needed to perform effectively and appropriately when interacting linguistically and culturally. It connotes communicating effectively and adequately in intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Kruse, Rakha & Calderone, 2018). Therefore, the paper explores the concepts of Communication, Intercultural Communication, Intercultural Communication Competency, and Multiethnic Churches, and highlights the benefits of Intercultural Communication Competency in managing Multiethnic Church Communities.

### Concept of Communication

Communication is vital to daily life; it is the most common everyday activity at the center of all human contact and fundamental to human life. It infuses every aspect of man's existence and endeavors. It is a process in which individuals interact with others, utilizing verbal and non-verbal symbols to create shared meaning or mutual understanding in different contexts using various channels. Communication allows the sharing of beliefs, values, ideas, and feelings; it also enables the building of solid and healthy relationships within groups and communities (ZhaiXiuwen & BakarRazali, 2020). The activities collectively called communication include talking, listening, having dialogues with ourselves, watching television, listening to the radio, reading, writing, singing, acting, and participating in group discussions. Others are browsing the internet, interviewing or being interviewed, creating visual images, responding to messages, looking for and imparting information, giving instructions and advice, having dialogues, sharing significant ideas, and imparting knowledge (Yu et al., 2020).

Human activities revolve more around communication because it is entwined with every aspect of human life; its pervasiveness, importance and complexity are sometimes overlooked. Communication impacts every part of our daily lives with others and messages from various people. No social system functions effectively without contact, for communicating through language and other symbolic forms comprises the ambiance of humankind's reality (Irwandi, 2017).

Communication is not only pervasive but also complex. It is not a machine-like phenomenon. Few discrete parts frequently create a single, predictable result, neither is the product of what

an individual does in response to another. On the contrary, it is an emergent phenomenon that arises from historical sedimentation and complex projective interactions among multiple variables, together with the individuals and circumstances in which they are embedded and the ongoing temporal sedimentations of the exchange itself (Quyen, 2017). The complex nature of communication is a reminder that the scripture affirms man is fearfully and wonderfully made with the incredible ability to communicate verbally and non-verbally through face-to-face and mediated communication (Penny, 2019). Humans reflect that, and it affects communication with others. Individual self-concept, gender, personality and culture influence how, when, why and what is communicated; communication defines, shapes, redefines and even reflects the reality of one's surrounding cultures (Abdullayev, 2020).

## Intercultural Communication

Many scholars have given explicit definitions for intercultural communication, but some are not deep enough to make it more transparent and understandable. Some scholars noted that intercultural communication is communication between persons or groups from various cultures (Izzulhaq & Simanjuntak, 2022). Several scholars have used different terms in referring to the same word of intercultural communication, such as 'trans-racial communication,' 'inter-racial communication,' 'cross-cultural communication,' and 'inter-ethnic communication' (Hassan, 2022). This clarifies the definition of intercultural communication as a communication process between two or more individuals of distinct cultures to achieve a specific goal. Moreover, it could also be the process of exchanging ideas between subcultures. Therefore, it is essential to note that intercultural communication refers to communication between individuals from distinctive cultures. Intercultural communication describes interaction between people from different cultures, focusing mainly on communication. When more than two people from different cultures interact and exchange information, it is called intercultural communication (Chen, 2017).

In general, it is understood that intercultural communication occurs when people from different cultures and ethnicities start communicating (Xiaodong & Guo-Ming, 2022). Intercultural communication concentrates on the interaction between members of different cultures or across diverse cultural boundaries and explores their communicative practices in interaction with each other. It involves sharing information on various stages of awareness and control amongst people with different cultural experiences and circumstances, including national cultural diversity and participation in multiple activities within a national unit. Intercultural communication could occur when individuals influenced by other cultural communities negotiate shared meaning in interactions (Matveev, 2017).

However, using culture and communication as a base, intercultural communication is termed as the sharing of information on diverse levels of awareness and control amongst people with different cultural backgrounds, where diverse cultural backgrounds include both national cultural differences and differences that are connected with participation in the various activities that exist within a national unit (Jimerson & Chen, 2022). In other words, intercultural communication connotes a process in which people from different cultural backgrounds interact and create a shared understanding to achieve personal goals and create relationships with others.

**Intercultural Communication Competency**

Understanding other cultures and intercultural communication is emphasized in the current globalized world due to the proliferation of internationalization, increasing multinational organizations (religious) cooperation, and mobility of the world population. Therefore, intercultural communication is required; with globalization, persons in all locations are increasingly mobile, and there are more kinds of mobility with language contact (Jenkins, Baker & Dewey, 2018). This phenomenon causes individuals to depend on each other, making the importance of intercultural Communication arise swiftly (Reimers & Connie, 2019).

The initial proposal of the concept of intercultural communication competency originated from Hymes' communicative competence. To capture some of the knowledge and skills that users of more than one language develop, scholars posited that language is the primary communicative code in conditions where it is the public code for those with different preferred languages. Intercultural communication competence (ICC) is a person's ability to engage in productive intercultural dialogues' methods, and relationships with people from diverse cultural backgrounds (Byram, 2018). Intercultural communication competency embodies the complex ability to perform effectively and appropriately when interacting with others who are linguistically or culturally different from oneself. Intercultural communication competency refers to the active possession by individuals of qualities that contribute to effective intercultural communication, which is defined in terms of three primary attributes: knowledge, skills and attitudes (Deardorff, 2019).

Knowledge in culture connotes a group's beliefs, values and norms that influence individuals' communication behaviors; more categories of knowledge considered are sociolinguistic awareness, cultural self-awareness, culture-specific understanding, and deep cultural knowledge. The attributes of skills informed by observing, listening, analyzing, evaluating, interpreting, and relating, which are critical abilities to process the developed knowledge. Also indispensable to the development of intercultural competence is vital self-reflection. However, attitudes connote respect, openness, and curiosity/discovery, which are fundamental for efficient intercultural communication. Consideration for others, active listening, or showing that they are appreciated and valued is significant for creating lasting relationships with people of different beliefs and values. Openness and curiosity refer to the willingness to move beyond our comfort zone (Gathers & Fields, 2022).

Ideally, if the essential attitudes, knowledge, and skills are acquired, internal outcomes, like empathy, flexibility and adaptability, will be achieved. As a result, individuals will respond to the other person according to their expectations. Communication effectiveness would result from the number of skills and knowledge acquired. The attitudes, knowledge, skills, and internal outcomes would lead to efficient intercultural communication behaviors (Oana-Antonia, 2019). Figure 1 below shows the components that resulted in intercultural communication competency.
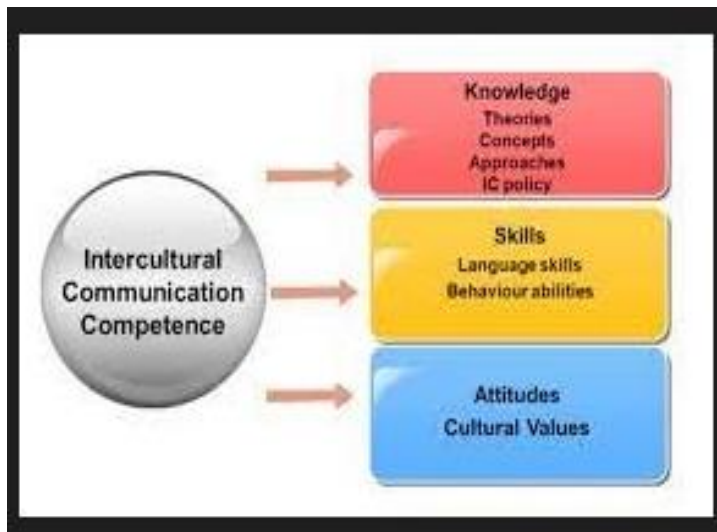
**Figure 1: Intercultural Communication Competence**

## Multiethnic Churches

The concept of a Multiethnic Church varies among different scholars. There are five different definitions from five multiethnic church experts. While all five definitions have similarities, each description has subtle nuances and differences. All agree that a multiethnic church is a church where different ethnic groups come together in a spirit of unity to worship as one so that the casual observer cannot simply label the church as black, white, Asian, or Hispanic. Some believe that for a church to be a multiethnic church, it should contain 20 percent of different ethnic groups to qualify (Thapliyal & Mahendra, 2022). Examples would be a 20 percent white and 80 percent black church or a 20 percent Hispanic, 20 percent Asian, 20 percent black and 40 percent white. While similar to multiethnic churches in many respects, multicultural churches embrace categories other than ethnicity.

The reality is that many multiethnic churches are multicultural, and the definition of a multiethnic church fits perfectly with the definition of a multicultural church. A multiethnic church welcomes people of all ethnic, social, and other national origins as equal, participating members and ministers in the church's fellowship. It also exemplifies the attitude and practice of accepting people of all ethnic, social, and national origins as church members (Caputo et al., 2019). Invariably, when a church possesses the attitude and practice of accepting people of all ethnic, class and national origins, equally and fully participating members and ministers in the fellowship of the church and the manifestation of the attitude and practice, which involves people of diverse ethnic, social and national communities as members in the church and has a touch of spiritual development, it is said to be a healthy church. While there is doubt that enjoying time with friends and social interaction are essential in the church, spiritual growth is critical; otherwise, the gathering is just a social club (Păuna et al., 2022).

**Benefits of Intercultural Communication Competency in Multiethnic Church**

Globalization, increasing migration, the development of transportation systems, the advancement of information technologies, international employment, study exchange programs, interdependent economies, foreign travel, political alliances, religious alliances and affiliations, as well as global peace threats, are bringing together people of different cultures and religions with an unprecedented regularity and urgency (Nicholas, 2019). Today, as the world is becoming a global community, intercultural interactions are becoming natural and necessary. Communication with people of different cultures is an everyday activity in the classroom, religious gatherings, healthcare, or politics. Intercultural communication is a captivating area of study within organizational communication.

This term refers to various organizational communication issues between individuals of different religious, social, ethnic, and educational backgrounds. All these people bring unique experiences and values to any congregation or religious organization characteristic of the culture they grew up in and are now operating. Intercultural communication is essential in the critical efforts to ensure world peace and stability, improve relationships between countries, ensure resource sustainability, promote values like tolerance and diversity, and manage a healthy multiethnic congregation (Patricia, 2018).

People of good cultural proficiency are indicated during communication based on self-awareness, attitude, listening and speaking skills, and empathy. Hence, they can communicate with people in a way that earns their respect and trust. Cultural competence comprises four elements: awareness of one's cultural worldview, cross-cultural skills, knowledge of different cultural practices and worldviews, and attitude toward cultural differences. Therefore, such individuals are very much aware of their culture, personal philosophy and communication styles, making them conscious of every physical and human setting to ensure effective Communication (Candel-Mora & Miguel, 2019). Cultural competence is substantial in interpersonal and intercultural communication for the following reasons.

**Understanding Communication Skills**

Intercultural communication competence helps individuals understand personal communication skills and appreciate that of others. This enables individuals to have effective communication in argumentative and non-argumentative contexts. Effective communication relies on conveying emotion, pain, and ambiguity through appropriate language. Everyday, there is a greater chance that you will interact with people who are not like you in age, physical ability, gender, ethnicity, class, religion, or nationality (Kim, Y, 2017). Such relationships help an individual learn about the world, break stereotypes, and acquire new skills ranging from greetings, dance, music, politics, sports, etc. A competent intercultural communicator can detect the differences in symbols, heroes and rituals between his and another culture because those aspects are reflected in practices and what the individuals do. Miscommunication resulting from such differences between cultures can be avoided quickly because the differences can be observed. It is more beneficial to consider dynamic and interconnectedness when discussing communication between cultures rather than being entirely separate and static. This indicates that being a competent intercultural communicator is necessary to understand communication skills (Ahmad et al., 2018).

## Understanding Variations in Language Use

Intercultural communication competence helps to understand cultural variations in language use. Intercultural competent communicators sometimes use idioms, ambiguities, expressions, and non-verbal codes during communication to know that the meaning of some expressions and phrases in certain cultures differ; hence, they can tolerate all communication tools. Inter-culturally competent communicators are very attentive to suitability. Fitness is the ability to communicate socially in a sensitive way with someone so as not to break rules that would lead to insults, threats or rudeness (Lu, Akinola & Mason, 2017). Inter-culturally competent communicators have a vested interest in upholding the rules of social behavior because they realize, however vaguely, that their ability to pursue their own goals depends on the freedom of others to follow their purposes. Therefore, personal control is more often an ally of social fitness than its enemy. In maintaining social conduct, it is pivotal for communicators to appreciate the linguistic background so that no cultural tongue dominates that of the other (Wang et al., 2022).

## Clarity in Presenting Information

Intercultural communication competency helps one to state information clearly and precisely. A competent intercultural communicator is believed to be ready to adjust their listening level of understanding without demeaning the person with whom to communicate. Such a person speaks more slowly in small chunks and efficiently directs listeners to crucial words. Effectiveness is the ability to achieve your goals through the communication process. In particular, such a person can maximize their potential to achieve their goal by selecting strategies that will enable them to succeed through interaction. Effective strategy selection is crucial for clear communication in cross-cultural contexts between competent cross-cultural communicators. Intercultural communication skills increase sending and receiving skills and make communication between people of different linguistic and cultural backgrounds as constructive as possible (Ni Lan, Wang & Bey-Ling, 2018). Interculturally competent communication promotes interpersonal relationships between people of different cultures; it improves people's knowledge and perception of each other, their motivation to engage in meaningful interactions, and their ability to communicate in a manner deemed appropriate and effective. Competency in intercultural communication enhances an individual's clarity of thought in the communication processes (Harwood & Gasiorek, 2019).

## Knowledge Development

Intercultural competent communicators could develop knowledge of other cultures and their understandings of illness, life and death, and their communication styles, hence developing attitudes open to others and understanding them; this is the concept of adaptation. For competent intercultural communicators, adaptation is critical in communication and negotiations. Having a diverse behavioral repertoire and understanding when to utilize it is the key to adaptability in innovative conditions. Since these values and assumptions are shared, it is easy to take them for granted and believe they are 'normal.' This way, people can think that how they behave and value things suits everyone. Cultures have coherent internal logic; therefore, they are valid because communication is inter and intra. Intercultural communication competence allows the individual or potential communicator to learn various lessons from elsewhere. It, therefore, translates into the construction and development of knowledge (Owen, Razali & Elhaj, 2019).

**Enhances Dignity and Respect**

Finally, dignity and respect are fundamental in every negotiation because everyone wants to be well treated. Intercultural competent communicators could demonstrate a positive regard for each other and appreciate one another. Thus, skilled intercultural communicators are always concerned for their image and listeners' image. This creates mutual respect for both parties to ensure effective communication. It helps to understand human reality as socially constructed as communication is facilitated between cultures. It helps to understand that different groups have different values, communication methods, customs, conventions, and assumptions. When sharing with someone from a different culture, we can, therefore, expect cultural differences to influence us (Quyen, 2017).

Cultural differences start from our differing perceptions, which determine how we communicate with other cultures. We better understand how people perceive the world, their values and beliefs, what they say and the anticipated cross-cultural misapprehensions. The more comprehensive an individual's outlook, the more tolerant and accommodating one becomes, promoting dignity and respect. The likelihood of close, personal, and non-people interactions with an individual by age, physical ability, gender, ethnicity, class, religion, race or nationality is increasing every day; it is informed by competency in intercultural communication. Moreover, competency in intercultural communication helps one learn about the world, break stereotypes, acquire new skills and honor the dignity of fellow humans irrespective of socio-economic background (Hammersley, 2019).

**CONCLUSION**

As vital as communication is to life, so is intercultural communication to a multiethnic community, while intercultural communication competency enhances a more productive intercultural relationship. This study has explored communication, intercultural communication, and intercultural communication competency as it relates to the benefits of managing multiethnic churches. The article believes that beyond intercultural communication is a process in which people from different cultural backgrounds interact and create a shared understanding to achieve personal goals and create relationships with others; its competency will help individuals understand personal skills of communication and appreciate that of others. This will help others understand cultural variations in language use; information will be clear and precise; knowledge of other cultures would be developed. It possesses understanding for proper adaptation. At the same time, dignity and respect would also be enhanced, thereby demonstrating a positive regard for one another and appreciating one another.

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