



## INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION AS A VERITABLE TOOL FOR CHURCH GROWTH AND MANAGEMENT IN LAGOS METROPOLIS

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**ABSTRACT:** *The reality of pluralism or multiculturalism of the church is evident from generation to generation since the inception of the church. In Lagos metropolis, the existence of diverse cultural and religious belief systems make intercultural communication a necessary skill for church growth and management. In view of this, the study investigated the level of awareness of intercultural communication and its relevance for church growth and management in Lagos metropolis. The framework for this study is premised on communication accommodation and cultural fusion theories. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design method while questionnaire was used as the instrument to gather relevant data from two hundred and ten respondents (210) selected amongst leaders and members of Baptist churches in Lagos metropolis. Baptist is one of the dominant denominations in Lagos. The study discovered that there is a high level of awareness of intercultural communication skill among members and leaders of the selected churches, but there is the challenge of language and cultural superiority among the respondents. This is capable of hindering church growth and management. Therefore, the study recommends that language and cultural superiority should be prevented in the church. More so, the church leaders and members need to undergo constant training on intercultural communication skills. The church needs to create intercultural functional management and administrative structure for equity and oneness among people of diverse cultures in the church.*

**KEYWORDS:** Church Growth, Church Management, Intercultural Communication.



## INTRODUCTION

Since the inauguration of the church on the Day of Pentecost, it has always been the assembly of people from diverse cultural affiliations and orientations (Adelakun & Oseni 2022). This could be one of the factors responsible for the challenge of pluralism faced by the early church. For instance, the earliest dissension in the early church resulted from infraction between the Hellenistic Jews and the Hebrew of Hebrews. The issue led to the election of the seven deacons for the sharing of the church's welfare package amicably among the widows of the Hellenistic Jews and the widows of the sedentary Jews in Palestine, to enable the Apostles to concentrate on prayer and ministry of the Word of God (Acts 6:1-7). The situation is not limited to the days of apostles in the early church. The reality of pluralism or multiculturalism of the church is evident from generation to generation. Lagos State comprises people virtually from all the major 380 ethnic groups and over 500 languages in Nigeria (Atowoju, 2023). The existence of diverse cultural and religious belief systems in the metropolis of Lagos makes intercultural communication a skill necessary for church growth and management.

### Conceptual Clarification

#### Concept of Intercultural Communication

Communication is not as easy as many people think, especially when dealing with people from different cultural backgrounds. Effective communication demands skill and understanding of different cultures and languages. In relation to this study, the concept of intercultural communication can be regarded as ability and skill needed in interaction with people from different cultures (Oana-Antonia, 2019). Another scholar, Panda (2020) explicitly argued that intercultural communication encompasses inter-ethnic, inter-religious, inter-regional communication, and communication among different sexual orientations. This underscores that intercultural communication skill is essential for human existence, peaceful communal living and global workforce regardless of people's religious affiliation or cultural orientation. Equally, for effective church growth and management, intercultural communication is an indispensable skill for pastoral leadership, church workers and church members.

#### Concept of Church Growth

The historical evolution of church growth is traceable to the work of Donald McGavran titled, "The Bridges of God" in 1955 (Wagner, 1981). According to Rainer (1993), McGavran's work was based on his experiences on the mission field in India for about two decades of labour where he noticed that the churches in the field lacked expected growth. McGavran's work forms a basis for the church growth movement and continues to gain popularity amongst missionaries and missiology scholars because he considered church growth as universal truth which is required of every church in every location of the world. Wagner alluded to McGavran work and described church growth as the science which investigates the nature, function, and health of the church in relation to disciples making, which is the Great Commission (Gibbs, 1995). A review of this definition suggests that church growth is not totally about the numerical increase of church members and physical expansion of the church edifice.

Apart from membership numerical increase, church growth involves increasing disciples everywhere and planting new churches across cultural boundaries and geographical locations. In essence, church growth is God's given obligation to the body of Christ—Christians of all generations. The purpose is to multiply disciples and gather believers across cultures and



people groups all over the world. More so, since there is no mono-ethnic or mono-cultural church, workers and leaders of the church are duty bound to possess intercultural communication skills to be able to handle the multicultural reality of the church.

### **Church Management**

Management can be termed as coordination and administration of operation to achieve organizational desired goals per time (Mohta, 2022). For Herrity (2023), management is generally described as the integral process of planning, organizing, staffing, direction, controlling and coordinating all activities as established organisations. In another way, Kaehler and Grundei (2019) described management as the act of bringing people together to attain stated aims and objectives efficiently and effectively through available resources. Obviously, the above definitions reveal that management has three dimensions, which are management of people, management of work and management of operation (Tyari, 2021). However, beyond managing physical resources, church management encompasses managing the spiritual life and growth of members. A scholar conceived church management as ministry, stewardship and managing of God's resources (Boaheng, 2023).

Consequently, some scholars conceptualized church management from business orientation that church management is a business function that provides leadership support to church's resources to achieve the vision and the planned goals of the church (Kwabena & Awuku-Gyampoh et al., 2021). These scholars argued that although the church is not a business organisation, the management of church members and resources required the provision of leadership and management structure. Similarly, Chatira and Mwenje (2018) also opined that the multicultural combination of the church demands development of management skills in pastoral leadership and training. In church management, leaders are not passive persons; they are also workers because they must ensure that all activities of the church are done and managed effectively.

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This study is premised on communication accommodation and cultural fusion theories. Both theories are considered applicable to achieve several elements of intercultural communication skills, such as openness and adaptation to new culture. In the first place, communication accommodation theory is a product of research work on how and when individuals accommodate the speech and non-verbal behaviour of others. A group of scholars postulated that communication accommodation theory deals with how people usually accommodate others when they feel positive about them (Rachyl & Howard et al., 2021). In church contests, people are expected to accommodate one another as children of the same family regardless of their cultural affiliation and ethnic divide. This makes cultural fusion theory equally relevant for this study. According to Croucher and Kramer (2017), cultural fusion theory gives individual intercultural identity, their native identity, as well as their new host culture identity. The theory has a framework to describe how people can acculturate into the dominant culture they move to. People tend to maintain important aspects of their culture while adopting aspects of the dominant culture.



Apparently, people feel free when interacting with individuals with common values and cultural affiliation. This is a deliberate action which usually enhances mutual relationship and understanding. On the contrary, some people tend to change their manner of communication when encountering individuals, especially from different cultural backgrounds. The leadership and members of the church should be able to understand and adapt to the culture of every other people group for the purpose of accommodating one another and fulfilling the purpose of existence of the church. In actual fact, multi-ethnic reality of the church is a basis for the relevance of communication adaptation and cultural fusion theories. History shows that no church is a mono cultural or ethnic congregation. Unfortunately, some churches in contemporary times lack expected growth, good management and administration due to the challenge of social status, disparity, ethnic and cultural discrimination. Some church members see themselves as members of the same cultural background instead of one body of Christ. Accommodation and cultural theories provide an effective framework against ethnocentric and all forms of attitude that are contrary to what the church represents without losing one's original identity and cultural value. These theories are equally relevant in promoting unity, fellowship and mutual love which are essential for church growth and management in any contest.

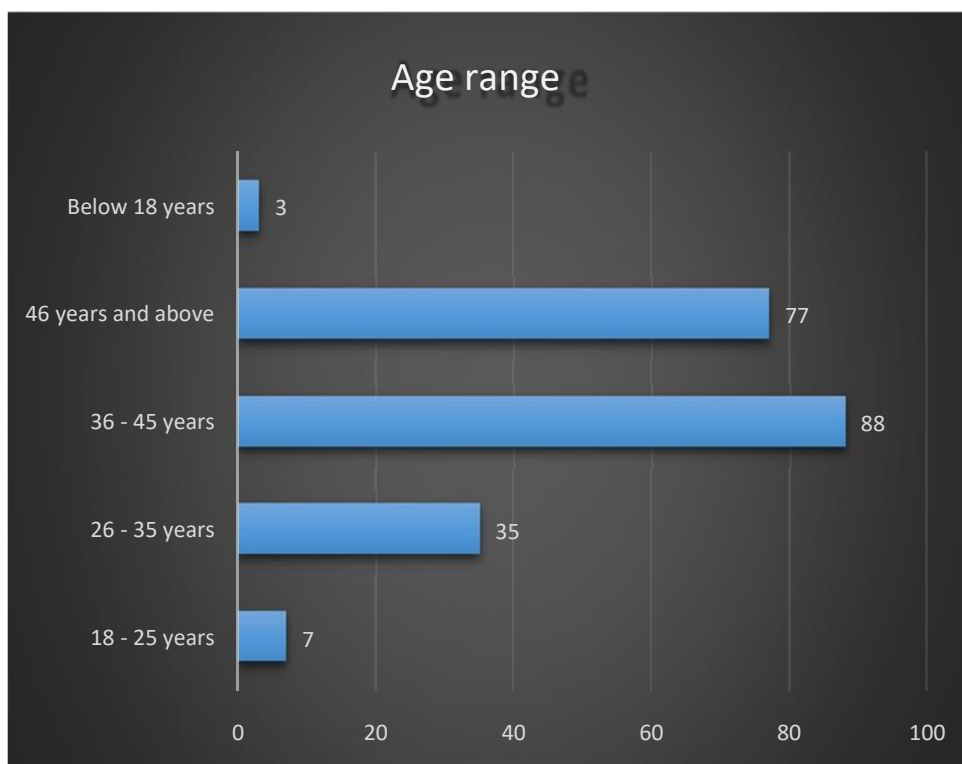
## **METHODOLOGY**

The study adopted descriptive survey research design to find out the importance of intercultural communication skill for church growth and management. The choice of Lagos metropolis is rooted in the reality of cultural diversity of the State. According to Adelokun and Oseni (2023), Lagos State is home and a habitat for people from different cultural backgrounds and ethnic nationalities. The targeted population of this research comprises selected leaders and members of Baptist churches in Lagos State metropolis. Relevant data and information were gathered from two hundred and ten (210) respondents. The respondents cut across both genders and different age groups in the church. The study adopted questionnaire as the research instrument to obtain information on the level of awareness of intercultural communication and its relevance for church growth and management. The data gathered were carefully scored, interpreted and analysed through frequency, simple percentage, table and graphical representation while corroborating the information with other scholars' opinion to ascertain the originality.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

### Demographic Data Presentation

The information of the respondents contains statistical analysis of age, gender, and respondents' awareness of intercultural communication and its relevance for church growth and management. For this study, both Google form and hard copy questionnaire were used to gather information. A total of one hundred and twenty (120) respondents participated through the Google form while one hundred and fifty (150) hard copies questionnaires were distributed. One hundred and twenty-four copies were retrieved (124). Ninety-seven (97) were valid while twenty-seven (27) were invalid. In summary, a total of two hundred and ten (210) responses were valid and used for this study.

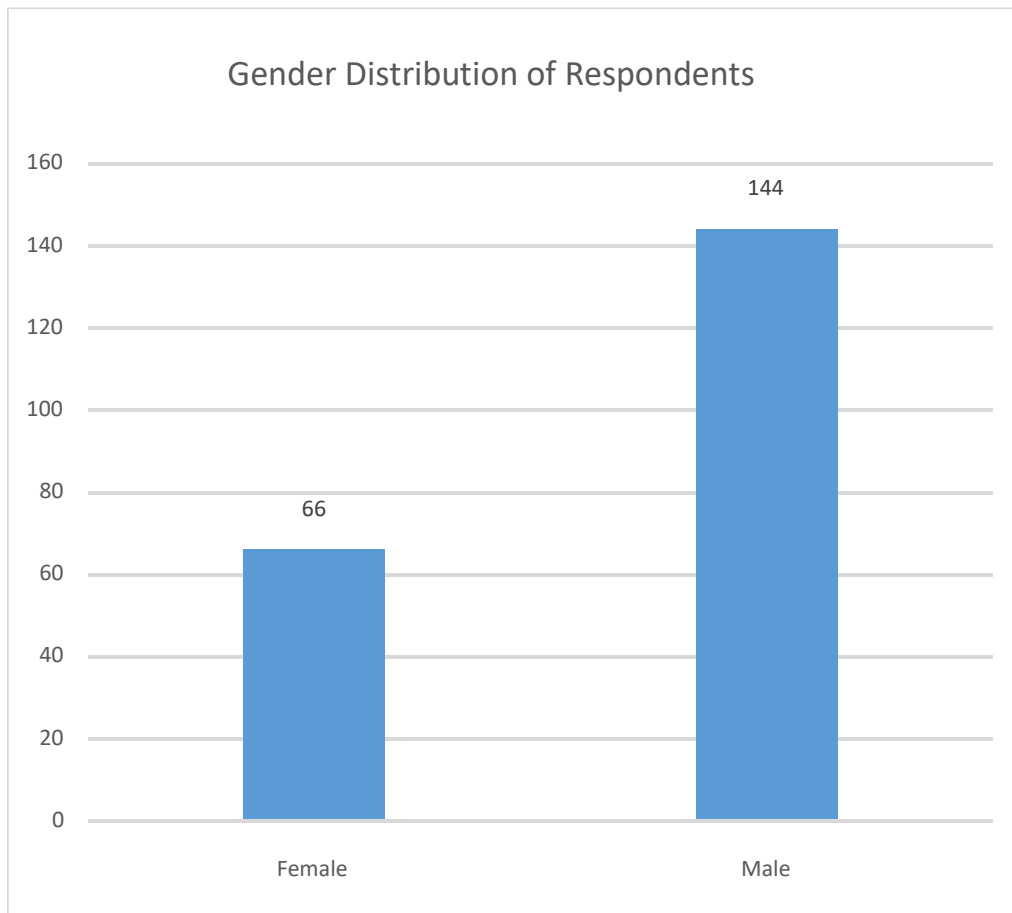


**Figure 1: Graphical Representation of Distribution of the Age of the Respondents**

**Source:** *Field Work, 2023*

The graph above covers different age groups in the church except children. It is obvious that the respondents cover people who are qualified to be leaders, workers and decision makers in the church. Of course, the young adults and older people constitute the highest respondents and they are usually the dominant age groups in most churches in contemporary times. They are age groups who are usually saddled with leadership responsibility and management of the church activities.

## Gender Distribution of Respondents



**Figure 2: Graphical Representation of the Gender of Respondents**

**Source:** *Field Work, 2023*

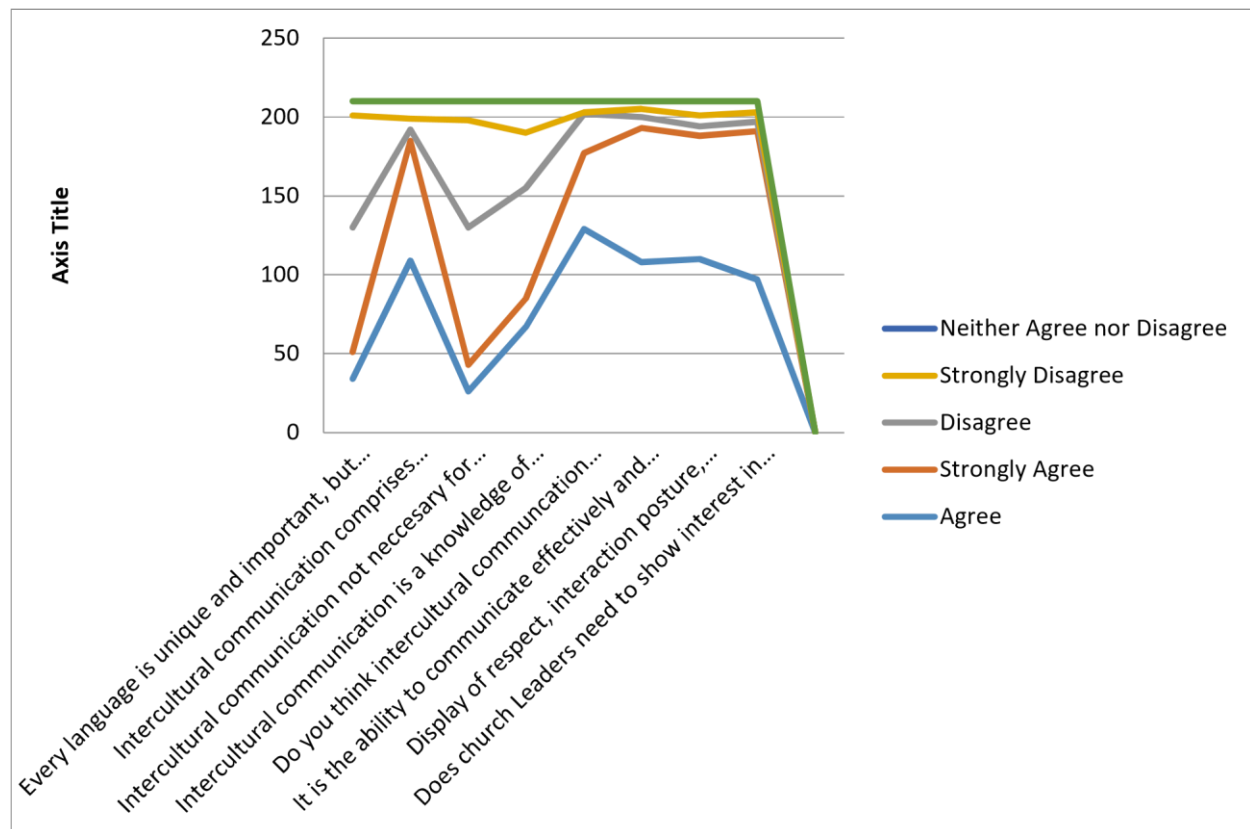
Based on the gender distribution, the male respondents were more than the female respondents as shown in the figure above. Generally, females are usually the dominant population in virtually every church around the world, but what made male respondents higher than female respondents could possibly be the focus of the study which is church growth and management. In church management and leadership administration, males are usually found at the helm of affairs.



**Table 1: A Summary of Responses on Awareness of Intercultural Communication and Its Relevance for Church growth and Management in Lagos Metropolis**

	Agree		Strongly Agree		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Neither Agree nor Disagree	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Every language is unique and important, but some are better than others.	34	16.2	17	8.1	79	37.6	71	33.8	9	4.1
Intercultural communication comprises personal attributes, communication skills, cultural awareness, psychological adaptation.	109	52	76	36.2	7	3.3	7	3.3	11	5.2
Intercultural communication is not necessary for church leadership once a leader is spiritually sound.	26	12.4	17	8.1	87	41.4	68	32.4	12	5.7
Intercultural communication is knowledge of language and cultures that are superior among a group of people.	67	32	18	8.6	70	33.3	35	16.7	20	9.5
Do you think intercultural communication affects Church growth and management	129	61.4	48	22.9	25	11.9	1	0.5	7	3.3
It is the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately among people from different cultures.	108	85	7	5	5	51.4	40.5	3.3	2.4	2.4
Display of respect, interaction posture, interaction management, empathy, and tolerance in communication with people from other cultures.	110	52.4	78	37.1	6	2.9	7	3.3	9	4.4
Do Church leaders need to show interest in other languages different from their own?	97	46.2	94	44.2	6	2.9	6	2.9	7	3.3

**Source: Field Work, 2023**



**Figure 3: Graphical Representation of Awareness of Intercultural Communication and Its Relevance for Church Growth and Management among Church Leaders and Members in Lagos Metropolis**

The result of the findings revealed that a large number of respondents are aware of intercultural communication, and equally agreed that intercultural communication is relevant for church growth and management. For instance, 109 respondents agreed and 76 respondents strongly agreed and corroborated the view of some scholars. For instance, Ruiyang and H. Hassan (2022) argued that the components of intercultural communication comprise personal attributes, communication skills, cultural awareness and psychological adaptation.

In relation to church growth and management, most of the respondents agreed that apart from spirituality, intercultural communication is also necessary for church growth and management. In other words, spiritual maturity cannot replace management skills. The multicultural reality of the church is an evidence of the relevance of intercultural communication skills for effective pastoral ministry, church growth and efficient management.

Consequently, in the analysis of the findings, the margin between the respondents who disagreed that intercultural communication is knowledge of language and culture that are superior among groups of people is very close to those who agreed. The finding reveals that the total number of respondents who both agree and strongly are eighty-five (85) respondents, which is accounted for (40.6%) while one hundred and five respondents (105) which is accounted for (50%) disagreed that intercultural communication is knowledge of language and culture that are superior among groups. This underscores that despite the high level of awareness of intercultural communication, there is still evidence of language and cultural





superiority among the respondents from different age groups in the population sample. This has direct implications for church growth and management in contemporary times. The challenge of language and cultural superiority has equally caused unwarranted disparity and prejudice among the leaders and members in many churches in contemporary times.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Effective management, growth and the fulfilment of the church's mission requires intercultural communication skills. The challenge of language and cultural superiority should be discouraged and prevented in the church if desired growth and effective management will be achieved. Like every human institution, intercultural communication skills are needed for effective church growth and management. Church leaders need unceasing training to acquire intercultural communication skill, which is, capacity to communicate effectively, act appropriately and relate well with people of different cultural backgrounds. In addition, since the church is a multicultural congregation, all members have roles to play in the affairs and ministry of the church. All members have to show tolerance in communication with people from other cultures. Unity and management of the church require that all members should possess intercultural communication skills. Finally, every church needs intercultural functional management and administrative structure. Invariably, every church has structures and patterns of operation, but not all structures or operation patterns enhance church growth and effective management. The multicultural reality of the church demands the church to create a functional structure for equity and oneness in the body regardless of the ethnicity, nationality or cultural affiliations of every member.

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