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## Relevance of Language Learning Evangelism and Education in the Spread of Christianity in Nigeria

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### ABSTRACT

This study explores the significance of language learning evangelism and education in the dissemination of Christianity in Nigeria. With over 500 indigenous languages, Nigeria presents unique linguistic and cultural challenges for evangelism. This paper examines how language proficiency enhances effective communication of Christian teachings, fosters community engagement, and promotes cultural sensitivity. By analyzing existing literature, conducting surveys, and observing evangelistic practices in diverse communities, the research highlights the positive correlation between language learning and the successful spread of Christianity. The aim of this study was to investigate the relevance of language learning education in the spread and growth of Christianity in Nigeria. The sampled group consisted of 540 mainline Christian churches, Pentecostal/Neo-Pentecostal Movement and Christian religious leaders. The methodology adopted in this study is, survey research design. The population of the study consisted of 540 respondents comprising 313 Mainline Christian Church Members, 192 Pentecostal/Neo-Pentecostal Movement Members and 35 Christian Religious Leaders, from which 230 respondents was determined using YARO YAMENT formula and was sampled through stratified random sampling

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#### ARTICLE INFO

Received: 25 September 2024 | Revised: 27 October 2024 | Accepted: 31 October 2024 | Published Online: 10 January 2025  
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30564/fls.v7i1.7356>

#### CITATION

Odey, E.A., Edor, J.E., Ekpenyong, E.O., et al., 2025. Relevance of Language Learning Evangelism and Education in the Spread of Christianity in Nigeria. *Forum for Linguistic Studies*. 7(1): 821–833. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30564/fls.v7i1.7356>

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technique. A 30 item questionnaire was used in collecting data constructed, validated and its reliability of 0.84 determined by using CRONBACH alpha formula. The data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions; whereas the null hypothesis was tested with ANOVA. The study found that, language learning education is a necessary requirement for cross cultural evangelism as well as successful penetration of Christianity to all the ethnic groups available in Nigeria and the study found that the 15 factors identified, were relevance of language learning education and has immensely contributed to the growth and spread of Christianity in Nigeria. It was recommended that language is the life of every human group in the universe. Recommendations include integrating language education in evangelistic programs to enhance outreach efforts. More so, there was a positive relationship between the spread and growth of Christianity and language learning education in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Christians; Language; Language Learning Education; Evangelism and Christianity

## 1. Introduction

The importance of linguistic interaction in the society as a form of social relationship cannot be over emphasized. *Lingua franca* has over the ages engendered social cordiality, peaceful co-existence, understanding as well as contributed mostly to social interaction and mobilization<sup>[1]</sup>. Hence, theological discuss encompasses language and communication are interwoven<sup>[2]</sup>. In fact, Fafunwa<sup>[3]</sup> corroborated above, maintaining that every aspect of religiosity comprises of language learning processes without which miscommunication, misinterpretation and misrepresentation occurs. In Hastings<sup>[4]</sup> view, Christianity in West Africa survived as a result of the strategy adopted by the missionaries, being local language learning and interpretative processes, these method caterpolled the missionary movement in Africa in general and Nigeria in particular. This method is referred to as religious acculturation. It is in this vein that, the paper considers the relevance of language learning in the growth and development of Christian religion in Nigeria.

Language according to Hornby<sup>[5]</sup> “Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of current English” is defined as human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, feeling and desire by means of a system of sound symbols. Thus, Kalu<sup>[6]</sup> averred language define the form of verbal and non-verbal action and reaction of a nation or race. In considering the definition above one clearly sees the implication of language in the functional activities of the Christian religion. As was observed in the advent of Christianity in Africa, Africans needed to be taught in their language to understand what the European missionaries were really driving at. National Commission on Colleges of Education<sup>[7]</sup> posit that “the colonial

education policy focused on language mainly at the primary school level, the scope of the present policy is multilevel, it reaches down to pre-primary as well as the secondary school level.” This goes to emphasizes why the early missionaries had to focus on the children to achieve greater impact<sup>[8]</sup>.

In the same view, Osunade<sup>[9]</sup> postulated for Christianity to make greater impact in Africa as a whole and Nigeria in particular till date, Africans themselves were the agent of it dissemination. This means Christianity was indigenized since Africans were themselves instrumental in the spread of the gospel. Gaiya<sup>[10]</sup> observed that the second missionary endeavor in Africa came in the main from Portugal and fails to make any lasting impact, because Portuguese did not indigenize the gospel by using Africans as agent of its dissemination. Also, Pobee<sup>[11]</sup> postulated that language played a major role in the spreading of the gospel, without which Christianity would not have existed in Africa. Similarly, Smith<sup>[12]</sup> maintains language learning enhances intercultural communication and understanding as Chukwu<sup>[13]</sup> defines intercultural communication as “the exchange of information between individual who are unlike culturally”. The benefits of intercultural communication are numerous as put by Pearson, Nelson, Titsworth & Harter<sup>[14]</sup> to include; our increasing exposure to people of other culture and co-cultures, our economic need to relate to other, our curiosity about others, the convergence of technologies, the influx of foreign – born immigrates, alien and refugees to one’s country. The above, therefore suggest that language learning is a necessary tool in every society, organization and institution to enhance the organization/institutional growth and development as suggestive of Tunde<sup>[15]</sup>.

Adetunji<sup>[16]</sup> postulates that the spread of Christianity

in Nigeria has been both rapid and complex, influenced by various socio-cultural and linguistic factors. As the country is home to numerous ethnic groups, language serves as a crucial medium for communication and understanding. This paper posits that language learning evangelism where individuals learn and use local languages to convey Christian messages plays a vital role in effective outreach and education. Nwosu<sup>[17]</sup> also added voice to above view, when he noted that local language evangelism fosters deeper connections with local communities, language learning not only aids in the transmission of religious beliefs but also respects and honors the cultural identities of the people being evangelized.

## 2. Literature Review

Language is a means of communication among human beings, it is a means of dissemination of information, it is also a means of transferring knowledge from one person to the other, it is a means of transferring of culture, religion, technology from one race to the other Adedimeji,<sup>[18]</sup> In this vein, NCCE<sup>[7]</sup> defines language as a system of communication by human beings. They further explain that language is one major advantage that human being have over the rest of the animal world. They argue that this does not mean that other lower animal do not communicate, they do, but that human language is the linguistic signal available to him and his community, it facilitates communication and is thus a communal tool. Azikiwe Uche<sup>[19]</sup> and Bamgbose<sup>[20]</sup> hold it that language distinguishes man from animals and one race from another, he also maintain that language is the vehicle for communication and the instrument for all creative thought. It is the medium of instruction for formal and informal learning.

According to Mark Phillip<sup>[21]</sup> language learning education in modern education consideration is necessary and common sense requires that bilingualism and language learning are important skills in pedagogical process. Further Bi-lystok<sup>[22]</sup> and Fowler<sup>[23]</sup> emphasized that language learning education was before taking backseat, but today data increasingly suggest that bilingualism is an important skill in the 21st century. This is why today many technological devices are translated in the traditional language of many countries in the world. This goes a long way to objectify the important of language and language learning education in our social interaction and relationship.

Christian and religion are two different concepts, which require different explanation; therefore, we shall consider the terms separately before attempting to give a scholastic definition of the term Christian religion. Christian according to Hornby<sup>[5]</sup> “Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of Current English” is referred to as Jesus and his teachings; it is the religion, beliefs, church etc based on the teaching of Jesus. Hasting<sup>[24]</sup> defines Christianity as the religion of Jesus Christ, it is also used to refer to the followers of Christ, and that the name Christian was first used in Antioch to refer to the followers of Christ.

Religion on the other hand, is a difficult term, which attracts varieties of definitions or explanations, depending on the approach of the one who is defining it. In other words the term could have as many definitions as there are scholars who approach it. However, religion could simply be defined as the worship of a supreme being. It has a deeper understanding than the above. It makes it difficult if not impossible to present a universally accepted definition of religion. It is on this note that Idowu<sup>[25]</sup> states that; everybody who is engaged in the study of religion has been convinced that an almost if not altogether impossible task; and every serious scholar is on the verge of giving up the task.

The Concise Columbia Encyclopedia<sup>[26]</sup> however defines religion as ... a system of thought, feeling and action shaded by a group that gives members an object of devotion, a code of ethics governing personal and social conducts, and a frame of reference relating individuals to their group and the universe. From the above definition of religion, we can therefore, define Christian religion, as the beliefs in the teachings, practices and doctrines of Jesus Christ. A religion founded by Christ and his followers known as Christian<sup>[27]</sup>.

Technically, growth and development is a process of moving from one level to the other, expansion from its very small beginning to a larger advancement. However, Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of Current English<sup>[5]</sup> defines growth as growing, development, process of growing, increase in size, and increase in value. It therefore, means that growth and development connote the same meaning. Previous studies indicate that effective communication is essential for successful evangelism. According to Ojo<sup>[28]</sup>, language barriers can hinder the understanding of theological concepts, leading to misinterpretations and resistance. Furthermore, Thompson<sup>[29]</sup> emphasizes that using local lan-

languages in preaching enhances receptivity and fosters trust between evangelists and communities. Language education promotes cultural sensitivity, which is crucial in religious contexts. Smith<sup>[30]</sup> argues that understanding cultural nuances allows evangelists to tailor their messages appropriately. By learning the local language, missionaries can engage more meaningfully with the community, addressing their specific needs and concerns. Several case studies highlight the success of language learning evangelism in Nigeria. For instance, the work of Adetunji<sup>[16]</sup> in the Yoruba-speaking regions illustrates how indigenous language use in church services increased attendance and participation. Conversely, studies by Nwosu<sup>[17]</sup> reveal the challenges faced by non-native speakers in effectively communicating religious teachings.

In the course of this research, the researcher observed there are no on-hand research on the relevance of language learning in the spread and development of Christianity, as such, this research will fill that gap by providing adequate and cogent information on the relevant/important of language learning in spread and development of any religion in the world.

## 2.1. Statement of the Problem

Language is a veritable tool in communication. Therefore, language learning cannot be overemphasize, it entails the whole process of learning, educating, communication, interactions, transmitting of facts and figures. It also involves dissemination of ideas and knowledge as well as innovations. Christianity in its contact with African in general and Nigeria in particular met with stiff measures to pass on the religion to the people of Africa and Nigeria. Since there was need to adequately transmit the religion to people, hence there was need for interpretation and translation and learning to assimilate and acclimatized with people and culture of Africa, language learning was necessitated either through formal or informal education. This process of language learning leading to the transfer of Christian religion and culture to the people of African and Nigeria is the concern of this research. The research further opine that this process of cultural adaptation and enculturation enhanced the spread and growth of Christian religion in Nigeria, which is why this research is set to proffer advantages and relevance of the language learning to the growth of Christianity. The study answers the

following research questions.

1. What are the regular, customary, traditional and cultural languages in Nigeria?
2. What are the innovative ideas of traditional language learning towards the development, spread and expansion of Christian religion in Nigeria?

## 2.2. Hypothesis

**Ho.** *There are no significant differences in the mean ratings of the regular customary, traditional and cultural language learning in Nigeria and the innovative ideas of traditional language learning towards development, spread and expansion of Christian religion in Nigeria.*

## 3. Methodology

This research employs a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data collection. Surveys were administered to local church leaders and congregants across various linguistic regions in Nigeria. Additionally, interviews with missionaries and language educators were conducted to gather insights on their experiences and strategies. Observational studies during evangelistic events provided further context on language use and its impact on community engagement. The design of the study is a survey research meant to collect data from a sample, members of some selected mainline Christian churches, and members of Pentecostal and Neo-Pentecostal Ministries. A survey design according to Olaitan and Nwoke<sup>[31]</sup> is one in which the entire population or representative sample is studied by collecting and analyzing data from the group through the use of questionnaire, interview or field observation.

The area of the study is located within the Calabar Municipality of Cross River State, Nigeria. The population for the study was 540 respondents made up of 313 members of some selected mainline Christian churches, 192 Pentecostal and Neo-Pentecostal Ministries, and 35 Christian religious leaders. Due to the large size of the population, the researcher, sampled 230 respondents determined using Yaro Yameni formula which comprises 133 members of some selected mainline Christian churches, 82 Pentecostal and Neo-Pentecostal Ministries and 15 Christian religious leaders, through proportionate stratified random sampling technique. This technique is considered appropriate because it takes into account the

identified characteristics relevant to the study and each segment was selected based on its proportion to the population (Uzoagulu)<sup>[32]</sup>.

An illustrated questionnaire was adopted for data collection. The instrument was gathered from field work perception and generated using analysis of similar academic documents. The instrument was organized on four responses formula, for the competency and strategy, items with corresponding scale value as follows; very great extent (VGE) = 4, great extent (GE) = 3, low extent (LE) = 2 and very low extent (VLE) = 1. While, 'strongly agree,' 'agree, disagree and strongly disagree' for research question two, with same rating scale. The questionnaire underwent a face test by 3 professionals 3 from the department of religious and cultural studies and 1 from department of Christian Religious Studies, University of Calabar, Calabar. Each of those tested were given a copy of the scientific document for adequate examination. Later adjusted and reduced to 35 to 30 based on their constructive criticism and suggestions.

20 copies of the instrument were given to 20 samples namely (12 members of Mainline Christian Churches, 6 Pentecostal and Neo-Pentecostal Ministries and 2 Christian religious leaders, to establish the reliability of the instrument. The reliability of the instrument was underscored using Cronbach Alpha ( $\alpha$ ). The computation yielded reliability coefficient of 0.83 which indicates the internal consistency of the instrument.

The data collected were analyzed using mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) with standard deviation (SD) to answer the questions and ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) to test the null hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance and 227 degree of freedom. The decision regarding the level of the perceived innovative strategy towards innovative strategies by mainline Christian churches and Pentecostal/Neo-Pentecostal Movement towards the relevance of language learning in the spread of Christianity in Nigeria were based on the upper and lower limit of the mean. Thus:

3.50–4.00 very great extent (VGE)

2.50–3.49 great extent (GE)

1.50–2.49 low extent (LE)

1.00–1.49 very low extent (VLE)

In the determination of the relevance of language learning in the spread and growth of Christianity in Nigeria, the mean was also the deciding statistic for the research question. Two the mean of 2.50 beyond was ruled as affirmative, while

instrument below 2.50 was deemed negative.

## 4. Results

The results of the analysis of the data collected were presented in **Tables 1–3** according to the research questions and hypothesis being answered and tested respectively.

### Research question one

What are the regular, customary, traditional and cultural languages in Nigeria?

The result of the analysis on table one on the mean response of members of mainline Christian churches, members of Pentecostal and Neo-Pentecostal Ministries as well as Christian religious leaders are with respective mean range of 1.20–2.48, 1.79–2.35 with grand mean of 1.94, 2.26 and 2.07 respectively indicated the adverse and significant prevalent of mother tongue in Nigeria during and after the advent of Christianity in Nigeria, signifying that for proper evangelization of the religion to the traditional African/Nigerian people, there was need for language learning, otherwise Christianity would not have made meaning to the people of Nigeria and vi-a vis the spread and development of the religion. In the same view, the overall grand mean of 2.09 revealed that the language learning education by both early Christian Missionaries helped in the successfully transmission of Christian religion to Africa as a whole and Nigeria in particular. More so, the SD of 0.89, 0.75, and 0.80 respectively for the three categories of the respondents are close therefore indicates agreement in their responses. This implies that language learning education is a necessary ingredient in the spread and development of any social organization.

### Research question two

What are the innovative ideas of traditional language learning education towards the development, spread and expansion of Christian religion in Nigeria?

**Table 2** above shows the mean and standard deviation responses of members of mainline churches, Pentecostal/Neo-Pentecostal movements, and Christian religious leaders. The result shows that the overall mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) and standard deviation (SD) scores range between 2.74 and 3.13 and 0.69 and 0.86 respectively for the three groups. More so, the grand mean of 2.88, 2.99 of members of Mainline churches, Pentecostal/Neo-Pentecostal movements, and Christian religious leaders respectively, with overall grand mean of 2.85

**Table 1.** Mean Rating and Standard Deviation on the regular customary, traditional and cultural languages in Nigeria.

S/N	Language Learning Education in Nig.	Mainline Christian Churches		Pentecostal and Neo-Pentecostal Movements		Christian Religious Leaders		Overall		Dee
		- SD1		- SD2		- SD3		- SD4		
		x1		x2		x3		x4		
1.	There are about 250 languages in Nigeria	2.31	0.91	2.40	0.32	1.98	0.84	2.23	0.69	LE
2.	There are many ethnic groups in Nigeria	2.46	0.94	2.38	0.06	2.03	0.93	2.29	0.83	LE
3.	Nigeria has six geo-political zones	2.12	0.97	2.26	0.78	2.10	0.86	2.16	0.87	LE
4.	In all the geo-political groups, different language subsist.	30	0.92	2.20	0.95	2.35	0.87	1.95	0.91	LE
5.	English language is the generally spoken language	1.51	0.95	2.32	0.85	2.01	0.67	1.95	0.82	LE
6.	One kilometer means another language	2.15	0.66	2.37	0.77	2.11	0.73	2.21	0.72	LE
7.	Yoruba language is one of the major language	2.30	0.95	2.31	0.68	2.33	0.75	2.31	0.79	LE
8.	Igbo language is one the major language recognize by government.	2.05	0.93	2.08	0.70	2.04	0.81	2.30	0.81	LE
9.	Hausa language is also a major language in Nigeria	2.13	0.86	2.41	0.83	2.15	0.78	2.23	0.82	LE
10.	There are other minor languages	2.19	0.90	1.97	0.78	1.99	0.69	2.05	0.79	LE
11.	Efik language is a minor language	1.20	0.98	2.06	0.84	1.79	0.74	1.68	0.85	LE
12.	Bette is a minor language	1.53	0.93	2.03	0.87	2.09	0.91	1.88	0.90	LE
13.	Urobo is a minor language	1.65	0.94	2.07	0.85	1.87	0.88	1.86	0.89	LE
14.	Ibibio is a minor language	2.04	0.83	2.09	0.74	2.06	0.76	2.06	0.78	LE
15.	Fulani is a minor language	2.18	0.73	2.21	0.61	2.16	0.73	2.15	0.68	LE
	Grand Mean ( $\chi$ )	1.94	0.89	2.26	0.75	2.07	0.80	2.09	0.81	LE

which were all above the benchmark of 2.50 indicated agreed to all the relevance of language learning to the growth and spread of Christianity. Hence, these relevance were found to be viable enough for the spread and development of Christianity in Nigeria.

The responses of the three groups of respondents were compared using one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) and the result indicate that the calculated F-ratio of 0.227 is less than the F-table value (critical value) of 3.32. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected, since the computed F is considered not significant. This implies that the three groups do not differ significantly in their opinion regarding the relevance of language learning in spread and growth of Christianity in Nigeria, as such, it could be recommended that this innovative strategy of language learning education in the spread of Christianity in Nigeria can be recommended for proper inter-cultural understanding/understanding and tolerance of other ethnic group, culture as a way forwarded for cross cultural evangelism in Nigeria.

## 5. Major Findings

1. All members of Mainline Christian churches, Pentecostal/Neo-Pentecostal movements, and Christian re-

ligious leaders indicated language learning education is a necessary requirement for cross cultural evangelism as well as successful penetration of Christianity to all the ethnic groups available in Nigeria.

2. The study found that the 15 factors identified, were in fact the relevance of language learning education which has immensely contributed to the growth and spread of Christianity in Nigeria.

### 5.1. Discussion of the Findings

The result on research question one showed that the 15 items investigated were generally at low level (LL), hence there is need for increase tempo on the language learning education because it is necessary for inter-personal and social interaction relationship. This finding is in consonance with the fact that relevance of language in the growth and development of Christian religion cannot be overestimated. Language has over the years postulated social integration, transfer of knowledge, cultural adaptation, interpretation, and means of educating. To this end, the research consider the impact language has played in the growth and development of the Christian religion, since the advent of Christian

**Table 2.** Mean Rating and Standard Deviation on the innovative ideas of traditional language learning education towards the development, spread and expansion of Christian religion in Nigeria.

S/N	Language Learning Education in Nig.	Mainline Christian Churches		Pentecostal and Neo-Pentecostal Movements		Christian Religious Leaders		Overall		Dee
		- SD1		- SD2		- SD3		- SD4		
		x1		x2		x3		x4		
	Engagement of interpreter	2.65	0.68	2.76	0.81	2.80	0.87	2.74	0.79	LE
	Translation of the Bible into local language	3.25	3.73	2.72	0.83	3.13	0.92	3.01	0.82	LE
	Native language hymn book	3.20	0.81	2.83	0.75	2.74	0.93	2.89	0.83	LE
	Training of locals through western education	2.78	0.73	3.92	0.67	3.01	0.98	3.24	0.79	LE
	Pastoral acculturation acclimatization	2.70	0.76	2.73	0.78	2.91	0.95	2.78	0.83	LE
	Cross cultural evangelism	2.61	0.71	3.08	0.71	2.78	2.91	0.82	2.78	LE
	Proper language learning and understanding enhances social interaction	3.21	0.82	2.89	0.80	3.16	0.86	3.09	0.83	LE
	Traditional language learning enhances the transfer of knowledge	2.89	0.65	2.79	0.75	3.04	0.67	2.91	0.69	LE
	It enhances the transfer of culture	3.07	0.74	3.20	0.72	3.02	0.85	3.10	0.77	LE
	Proper dissemination of the gospel	3.06	0.73	3.12	0.77	3.21	0.90	3.13	0.80	LE
	As people understands Christian teachings and preaching the gospel spread	3.13	0.69	2.75	0.92	3.07	0.97	2.98	0.86	LE
	The more people interact with missionaries/evangelist Christianity spread	2.76	0.66	3.16	0.85	2.89	0.92	2.94	0.81	LE
	Language learning education encourage diversity	2.75	0.78	2.96	0.79	3.05	0.94	2.83	0.81	LE
	Transfer of culture and cultural adaptation	2.89	0.74	3.02	0.65	3.11	0.82	3.01	0.74	LE
	Language learning is a means of Education	2.26	0.87	2.76	0.72	2.95	0.74	2.80	0.77	LE
	Grand Mean	2.88	0.74	2.96	0.77	2.99	0.88	2.95	0.85	LE

**Table 3.** ANOVA Comparism of the mean responses of members of mainline Christian churches, Pentecostal/Neo-Pentecostal movements and Christian religious leaders on the relevance of language learning education in the spread of Christianity in Nigeria.

Respondents	Df	Sum Square (SS)	Mean Square (MS)	f-cal	Critical Value	Signature	Dee
Between group 2	2	0.69	0.345	0.227	3.32	NS	Do not Reject
	2.27	343.83	1.52				
Total	229	344.52					

missionaries in Africa.

Language as a cause for unity and conflict:

According to Levitt<sup>[28]</sup> Language usage in new immigrant religious institutors is simultaneously contested terrain and a bedrock for member’s unity and institutional commitment. This appears to be the case in some Christian religious organization structure of activities. In as much as language serves as a motivating force to bring members to a religious group, it at the same time cause conflict among members<sup>[29]</sup>. This is noticed in the fact that members tend to be closer to members of the same ethnic background. In this vein, Mullins<sup>[30]</sup> asserted that a number of theoretical models of the evolution of immigrant congregation assume that lan-

guage usage is the central variable that impact s change. Levitt<sup>[28]</sup> also added that “during our focus groups with clerical and lay leaders immigrant congregations in Houston, conflicts regarding language usage emerged as one of their most central concerns”. This could also be observed in the fact that most Christian religious organization in Nigeria and their spiritual leader/pastor are insistence on the use of English language as a general language for all members for the prevention of conflict and acrimony<sup>[33]</sup>.

However, members occasionally base on the turnout of people in a particular organizational services, that is, if there are good numbers of Yorubas, Igbos or Efiks, self-consciously select languages for formal services and reli-

gious education classes in pursuit of institutional goals, while other members unconsciously employ languages in informal contexts that can both enhance solidarity or promote disunity<sup>[34]</sup>. Differences in native language, and in dialects often constitute the bases for segregation among members and frequently for inter-generational strains and tensions. Nonetheless, the use of Nigerian languages also provides a comfort zone for members of that ethnic background which in-turns enhances their sense of well-being and congregational commitment.

Levitt<sup>[33]</sup> writing on the segregation and conflict in a multi-language congregation noted that “this formal segregation is but the tip of the iceberg. Whenever a congregation consists of different native language speakers, there is strong tendency for them to self-segregate at social and other informal occasions held at the religious site or in conjunction with religious practices... Ogunyemi<sup>[35]</sup> maintains self-segregation serves both to threaten the unity and coherence of the congregation. It is in this vein, the most Christian religious group’s leaders allows members to form different associations according to their ethnic background.

Ojo<sup>[36]</sup> further stated that segregation formal socializing along linguistic lines is found in most multilingual congregation. Thus she quoted the statement of a Muslim in a mosque in her studies “Religion and the New Immigrants”. Communication is a big problem. Naturally whenever we go socialize, we want to talk to people who will understand us. For many of us, it is easiest to communicate in our native language. So you will find (at mosque social events). All the Egyptians are sitting at one table, all the Indians and Pakistan’s at another and all the (English-speaking) converts together..... when people cannot communicate, tensions are created and they are not easily resolved”. From the backdrop, tension is precipitated among the Christian religious members in Nigeria, because membership strength are made up of people from different ethnic groups in Nigeria.

#### Social Integration:

Zacharias<sup>[37]</sup> aligns with the findings above, maintaining that Language without any dispute enhances social integration. An African man will definitely identify simply with a race of his language. This was the main reason why the Africans treated the European missionaries with contempt after the abolition of slave trade, and they (Africans) refuse to identify with the European missionaries and reli-

gion (Christianity). This was mainly because they saw them as tractors. Until when Christianity was indigenize, that the religion receive greater acceptance by the Africans, this was because they (Africans) saw an African as a brother and could understood his language. Thus in the words of<sup>[9]</sup> “it is evident that where Christianity lingered for a long time, even surviving till today, Africans themselves were the agent of its dissemination. This means Christianity was indigenized since Africans were themselves instruments in the spread of the gospel”.

Indigenization of Christianity further enhance and attract many Africans to the religion, this is because they could understand themselves in their spoken language, the doctrine of the Christian religion had to be adjusted to suit the African minds, thus church songs, bible, sermon, religious processions, dance and instrument had to be translated, modified and used to create an acceptance of the Christian religion by Africans. It is in this vein, Metuh<sup>[38]</sup> maintains that “the proliferation of Afro-Christian churches was due to the intolerance by the missionaries of this tendency of the new converts to introduce elements of their traditional religious beliefs into Christianity” this spirit of brotherliness engendered by language, therefore brought about social solidarity, integration and mobilization which tends to help in the rapid growth and development of the Christian Religion in Africa. Example is seen in the life of Samuel Ajaji Crowther who was an ex-slave from Sierra Leone who return to Abeokuta to set up a mission, made great success because of his influence as an African and a Yoruba man; again language power came into play in attracting the Yorubas to Christian religion in the Yoruba land<sup>[39]</sup>.

More so, Donvan<sup>[40]</sup> in trying to describe religious syncretism maintained “the need is not to mix the truth of the teachings of other religions, but to state the biblical truth in ways that are truly Christian but also truly African in expression”. An example of where this is already taking placed would be the indigenous Christian music created by various church groups.

#### Transfer of knowledge:

Language during the advent of Christian religion in Africa aided the transfer of knowledge between the Africans and the European missionaries. Chukwu<sup>[13]</sup> in Pearson J. C. et al.<sup>[14]</sup> define inter-cultural communication as “the exchange of information between individual who are unlike



culturally” this therefore, means that without the proper use of language learning education, there will be no transfer of knowledge, thus, in the advent of Christianity in Africa, efforts were being driven towards the studying and interpretation of the missionary language into Africans languages. In 1874 and 1868 respectively, Babalola<sup>[39]</sup> opined that many Africans were being ordained ministers of the Christian churches and the Christian Bible translated into African language. Hence, with the aid of interpreters to enhance effective communication between the missionaries and the Africans, knowledge transfer emerge, as the missionaries who were dying of malaria began to ask question, how the Africans were surviving from Malaria? With the aid of language, the Africans were able to educate the missionaries about the African herbs and roots. In the same vein, the European introduced the use of chloroquin for Malaria. Also, language learning education aided in the economic activities of the African region. According to Atoe<sup>[41]</sup> most of the European missionaries were mostly interested in the economic activities more than their missionaries work, thus, with the free flow of language, agricultural material such as palm oil, rubber and yam tubers were exported from West African region. The Africans on their part took advantage of the situation, hence they were able to generate income, and in the end this attracted many Africans to the Christian religion. Babalola<sup>[39]</sup> puts it that at the period between 1868 and 1872, because of the exploit of the Africans and their language, the mission very quickly established a strong political influence, supported by ex-slave and strengthened by the fear of slave rebellions among rulers.

#### Transfer of Culture/Cultural Adaptation:

According to Metuh<sup>[38]</sup>, evangelization is carrying out the mandate given by Jesus to his disciples; “Go, therefore, makes disciples of all nations” (Mt. 28:19). Enculturation on the other hand, is the process through which the gospel message is incarnated in a particular human culture. Enculturation is therefore, as it were a corollary of evangelization. The above views by Metuch<sup>[38]</sup> reflect on the fact that for effective evangelization to take place, cultural adaptation of the parties involve takes place immediately in contact. It is observed that at the advent of Christianity in West Africa, when proper communication skills were instituted, that is language understanding; Africans began to adapt to the European culture, such as mode of dressing, style of food intake,

life style. For instance, the early Africans Christian teachers dress in the same style and form of the European culture. Atoe<sup>[41]</sup> maintain that Africans began to appreciate European goods such as dry gin, beverages and also became interested in the white collar job as a result of the understanding that transpired because of communication (language) as well as the Christian mission education which enhance employment into the civil service.

At this juncture, African began to learn the English language in the school, to be able to identify with the European missionaries and most of the educational curriculum were made in such a way that it follows the British system of education, this greatly affected the Africans, as they began to take to the foreign culture and pattern. It is in this vein, that members of our Nigeria society regret that moral virtues have been neglected and abandoned for western values as a result of cultural adaptation. To this end, Apenda and Atega<sup>[42]</sup> regret that “Moral virtues have been neglected and abandoned for Western values which are at variance with African values”.

#### Interpreter/Interpretation:

As earlier mention, language learning education enhance the interpretation of the bible and the indigenization of Christian music, using of the traditional African musical instrument in the church services all these is done to ensure that the Christian religion suit the Africans. Thus, Donovan<sup>[40]</sup> maintains, the essence of the syncretism was to state the biblical truth in ways that are true to African life and experience. In other words, theology must be truly Christian but also truly African in expression. Babalola<sup>[39]</sup> asserted that by 1868, the whole of the bible had been translated into Efik in Calabar language; this also aided the interpretation of some of the African cultural and customary practices. For instance, among the Efiks, a reformist spirit soon began to manifest itself and in 1850, the ruling Ekpe secret society itself enacted a law that human scarifies, killing of twins should cease.

#### Language Learning Education as Means of Education:

Language is a system of communication by human being<sup>[6]</sup>. This implies that in the advent of Christian education, the local language of the Africans had to be employed to be able to teach the African effectively. The missionary’s language, such as English language was also adopted, and the pupils were taught in English. It is in this respect, that

English language was adopted as the lingua franca for Nigeria. In this vein, the National Policy in Education (NPE) maintained “the business of the National Assembly shall be conducted in English and Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba language for adequate arrangement and understanding”.

Smith<sup>[30]</sup> emphasized cultural sensitization where he maintained what the findings of this research revealed that a strong correlation between language proficiency and the effectiveness of evangelistic efforts. More so, Okeke<sup>[43]</sup> corroborated further, he asserts respondents reported that sermons delivered in local languages resulted in higher levels of comprehension and engagement as revealed in the research findings. Furthermore, Iwuanyanwu<sup>[44]</sup> avers communities expressed a greater willingness to embrace Christianity when evangelists demonstrated respect for their linguistic heritage. However, challenges such as limited resources for language education and varying levels of language proficiency among evangelists were also noted. In the same vein, Eze<sup>[45]</sup> and Adeyemi<sup>[46]</sup> inferred language learning facilitates clearer communication of Christian doctrines. Speaking the local language fosters trust and rapport with community members and cultural Integration snowballing into producing evangelists who engage with local languages and are viewed as more respectful and culturally aware. Language learning evangelism refers to the promotion and teaching of languages as a means of cultural exchange, communication, and understanding. It emphasizes the importance of language in connecting people and fostering global citizenship. Socio-linguistically, Cristal<sup>[47]</sup> and Mabogunje<sup>[48]</sup> added a collorary above discuss qualities of language learning evangelism, they emphasized that language learning evangelism examines how language interacts with social factors. Understanding the role of language in identity, community, and culture is crucial for evangelizing language learning. They further maintained, Second Language Acquisition (SLA) regenerate focuses on how people learn languages beyond their mother tongue. Theories such as Krashen’s Input Hypothesis highlight the importance of comprehensible input in language learning. Hitherto, highlighting Cultural Linguistics which explores how language reflects cultural values and practices. This approach can enhance language learning by making learners aware of the cultural context behind language use.

Kalu<sup>[49]</sup> inferred that Practical approaches to language learning evangelism involves communicative Language

Teaching (CLT). Emphasizing it stems from interaction and the practical use of language in real-life situations. This method aligns well with the evangelistic approach by encouraging learners to engage with the language actively. Again, in his views, Task-Based Learning intertwines with using meaningful tasks as the central component of language learning. This approach not only teaches language but also promotes collaboration and cultural exchange. He further explains content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) Combines language learning with subject matter content. This method can be particularly effective in evangelizing language education by demonstrating the applicability of language skills in various fields.

## 5.2. Recommendations

One basic recommendation this research has to offer is the fact that all languages are important especially to the ethnic group it belongs to, as such every language should be regarded as important.

It is important to note also that language is the life of every human group in the universe. No human group should down-tool on its language which is the source of its cultural and customary existence. Therefore every language should be held in high esteem.

No nation, state, community or locality should allow its language to go into extinction. Therefore, all parents owe it to their children to teach them their mother tongue. Every country should insist that foreign immigrant to undergo a yearly course to study its language. Tertiary institution in Nigeria should explore the use of native tongue in academic teaching and learning pedagogy.

**Language Training Programs:** Churches and mission organizations should implement language training programs for missionaries and church leaders to improve their linguistic capabilities.

**Collaborative Efforts:** Partnerships with local educators and linguists can enhance language learning resources and promote cultural sensitivity.

**Integration into Curriculum:** Language learning should be integrated into theological education to prepare future leaders for effective ministry in linguistically diverse settings.

**Community Engagement Initiatives:** Encourage evangelistic efforts that prioritize community involvement, utiliz-

ing local languages in outreach activities.

## 6. Conclusions

Language is a viable tool for effective communication in the society. And this has been found to be greater force in the advancement and spreading of the gospel. To this end, this research advocate the use of mother tongue in the preaching of the Christian gospel to enhance effective understanding and interpretation of the teaching and life of Christ.

Language learning evangelism and education are pivotal in the spread of Christianity in Nigeria. By addressing linguistic barriers and fostering cultural sensitivity, evangelists can significantly enhance their outreach efforts. As Nigeria continues to evolve as a multicultural and multilingual society, the integration of language learning into evangelistic strategies will be essential.

## Author Contributions

Conceptualization: E.A.O., Methodology: O.O.A., Data Analysis: L.A.E., Writing—Review and Editing: E.A.O., Software: G.A.E., Validation: J.E.E., Investigation: E.O.E., Formal Analysis: I.E.B., Visualization: E.N.N.

## Funding

This work received no external funding.

## Institutional Review Board Statement

The study was conducted in accordance with the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Arts, University of Calabar who granted approval for the research work titled: “Relevance of Language Learning Evangelism and Education in the Spread Of Christianity in Nigeria”, with approval number UC/FA/EC/24/002.

## Informed Consent Statement

Not applicable.

## Data Availability Statement

Data is available and supported: contact corresponding author for more information.

## Acknowledgments

The authors hereby acknowledge the resource materials used in writing of this article.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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