

## **Dynamics of Contextualized Theological Education for Transformative Cross-Cultural Communication in Missions**

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### **Abstract**

This study examined the dynamics of contextualized theological education toward transformative cross-cultural communication in the framework of modern missions. One of the most important tasks of missions is sharing the Gospel message. Sometimes, the culture in which the communication takes place differs from the cultures of the speakers and the listeners. As such, in missions, especially in a cross-cultural setting, cross-cultural communication is a crucial and important skill. The Gospel message's efficacy and appeal to potential listeners are frequently harmed by a lack of such competence. Therefore, when context is taken into account, the theological education that is mission-oriented cannot but be contextualized to provide appropriate skills that will promote transformative cross-cultural communication. This paper examines the dynamics of contextualized theological education against this backdrop. The study employed the descriptive research approach to elaborate on the dynamics of contextualized theological education, which attempts to accurately and pertinently convey the Gospel message in a cross-cultural environment. It was discovered that transformative cross-cultural Gospel communication in missions requires a theological education that is contextually grounded, linguistically inclined, and worldview focused. The study concluded that since transformative cross-cultural communication is integral in Christian Missions, theological education which is the "labour chamber" through which missionaries are

birthed must be contextualized to provide contextual skills for the missionaries.

### **Introduction**

The command to proclaim the Gospel message to all nations, to baptise them and to disciple them involve interaction with the culture of all nations. The task of sharing the love of God with the people of all nations requires understanding of cross-cultural communication for effective missions. The interaction between mission and culture has been a recurrent issue in the history of Christian missions. In this condition, Richard (1975, p. 11) posits that “Christianity, whether defined as Church, creed or ethics or movement or thought, itself moves between the poles of Christ and Culture.” All through the history of Christianity, the church in missions has always faced the issue of intertwine between the Gospel and culture.

When the western missionaries brought the Gospel to Africa, they encountered a culture that is different from their own. As a result of their perception of the culture and lack of interest in cultural relativism, they undermined the uniqueness of Africa culture and applied ethnocentrism to Africa culture. This shows the significance of cross-cultural techniques in communicating the Gospel message across culture. One of the fundamental tasks of Christian missions is communicating the Gospel message. Communicating the Gospel message across culture is not as simple as it may seem. The reason is that there is a collision of three cultures model in cross-cultural communication in mission. This includes the Bible culture, the missionary culture, and the respondent culture. Consequently, to efficiently communicate the Gospel message in cross cultural context, the theological education must be contextualized in content, process and approach to provide basic contextual skills, to address the contemporary issues about mission fields and target groups, and to transmit the Gospel message into the worldview of the potential audience. In the same vein, a cross-cultural communication that will transform the audience must be built upon the language, culture and worldview of the audience. As such, theological education which is the “labour room” where contemporary missionaries are being trained and prepared for missional practice needs to be contextualized.

Therefore, with contextualized theological education, cross-cultural communication in missions can be transformative and missionaries can overcome their ethnocentrism propensity and communicate the Gospel message effectively. The research method employed in this study is descriptive research method. In corollary to the above, this study examines dynamics of contextualized theological education for transformative cross-cultural communication in missions. The study examines the concepts of culture, contextualization, theological education, dynamics, Christian missions, and describes cross-cultural communication, as well as dynamics of contextualized theological education. Moreover, findings from this study will benefit cross-cultural missionaries in any context or field across the world.

### **Conceptual Clarification of Key Terms**

#### **A. Culture**

The term culture is a derivation from the Latin verb *colere*, meaning to cultivate or instruct and the noun *cultus*, meaning cultivation or training (Boaheng, 2020, p. 2). Similarly, culture (Ger. *Kultur*) has been employed to designate the total non-biologically transmitted heritage of man (Kraft, 1980, p. 46). From this background, the word “culture” as a designation or label in the anthropological sense can be defined as “the integrated system of learned behaviour patterns which are characteristic of the members of a society and which are not the result of biological inheritance” (*Ibid*). Consequently, culture is the total life way of a people, the social legacy an individual acquires from his community (Kraft, 1996, p. 38). In this sense, culture is what a group of people share in common which result from their social inheritance. Guest (2018, p. 30) in a similar sense, describes culture as a “System of knowledge, belief, and patterns of behaviour, artefacts, and institutions that are created, learned, shared and contested by a group of people. It is the manual for understanding and interacting with the people which includes shared norms, values, and symbols, mental maps of reality, and material objects and structure of power.” Guest’s Assertion that culture serves as a manual for understanding and interacting with people and as a symbol of reality which also connote “identity” is worthy of note. For instance, to some extent, the language a person speaks informs others of the culture such a person belongs. A person who speaks the Tangale language

could be easily identified as Tangale or as coming from the Tangale region in Gombe state, Nigeria. Likewise, a person's dressing.

In collaboration with the above, Asante (1995, p. 5) opines that the aim of culture is to define a group's identity and aspirations, to serve as the basis of social behaviour and as a factor determining what is to be accepted or rejected in a given situation. In this sense, culture does not only serve as a means of identification, but it also aims to define group aspirations. In other words, culture is not limited to the past and present of a group of people; instead, it also projects their future. This means that culture has the potential to inform others what a group of people intend to achieve in life and for which reason they behave the way they do.

### ***B. Contextualization***

Contextualization is the act of weaving given concepts and context together to make it relevant to culture, worldview, values, historical situations, and a particular group of people. In Christian missions sense, contextualisation can be defined as the act of making the message of God's redemptive love through Jesus Christ reflective and come alive as it relates to the vital issues of a social-cultural context and transform its worldview, value, and goals (Sanchez, 1998, p. 318). In other words, it is an act of sharing the Gospel message with a particular people from the perspective of their cultural values, beliefs, and worldviews.

Likewise, Luzbetak (1988, p. 79) defines contextualisation as "the process by which a local Christian community integrates the Gospel message with the real-life context, blending text and context into that single, God-intended reality called Christian living." Luzbetak's definition captured the idea of contextualization very well, which is to integrate the Gospel message within a local culture in a way that is faithful to God's revelation and relevant to the culture. It explained the process as it involves the Scripture with the real-life context of the audience.

### ***C. Theological Education***

Theological education according to Bello (2019, p. 348) is the organization and construction of understanding and idea of and about

God with the view to bring it into the most possible reality of existence and supremacy of the Invisible Being. The process involves leading God called men out of the bondage of ignorance to knowledge, equipping them to know the reality and facts about God, guiding them from the realm of the darkened mind to the glorious enlightenment of the word of God. In other words, it is the education which focuses on God and the act of bringing men into the understanding of God. More precisely, theological education is the process through which God-called individual men and women who have yielded to the leading of the Holy Spirit and recommended by the church are equipped with practical skills to render biblical and Christian ministry in the church, church related organization, and society.

#### ***D. Dynamics***

Dynamics, according to Merriam-Webster dictionary is a pattern or process of change, growth or activity- population dynamics. Dynamics in this context is defined as those things that make contextualized theological education workable and unique. It is the activities, ideas and principles that makes the total theological education contextual, transform cross-cultural communication in missions to be effective, practicable, and realistic.

#### ***E. Christian Missions***

Christian missions is multifaceted mission, its scope ranges from witnessing, servicing, healing, reconciling, liberating, sharing peace, evangelising, fellowshiping and church planting (Bosch, 2011, p. 37). As such, the term missions described the various specific efforts of the church to carry out the task of mission in the world. This is related to the spread of the Gospel and the expansion of the kingdom of God. Therefore, Christian missions is the activities of God's people, the church, to proclaim and to demonstrate the kingdom of God to the world. Christian missions has the whole world as its scope, which involves going from one culture to another. As such, Cross-cultural in mission involves leaving the comfort and familiarity of one's own culture to enter another culture with the purpose of proclaiming the Gospel message (Boaheng, 2020, p. 4).

### **Concept and Idiosyncracies of Cross-Cultural Communication**

Cross-cultural communication is a communication that takes place in the culture and context that is different from the speaker's culture and context. Missionaries who engage in cross-culture missions do so to communicate the Gospel message. Fulfilling the great commission involves communication. Without communicating the Gospel message to the potential respondents in their mental map of reality, it will not be easy for them to become disciples. As such, communication is an integral part of cross-cultural missions. In agreement, Hughes (1998, p. 278) contends that Cross-culture communication requires learning the language of the ethnolinguistic group in order to build bridges for the Gospel message to those who have not heard. This proclamation always takes place through language, worldviews, values, and beliefs. Meanwhile, language and worldview are the predominant aspect of culture that facilitates the effectiveness of communication in any given culture and context. The reason is that language is the channel through which the Gospel message is disseminated to the people, while worldview is the channel through which the meaning is produced (Boaheng, 2020, p. 4). For instance, if an elderly Yoruba man asks a young boy to greet a visitor, the boy will immediately prostrate. Although the boy was not told to prostrate, yet he understood "greeting" to mean prostrate. In this sense, Agyekum (2010, p. 18), opines that "language is so important that without it, effective verbal communication is impossible." In other words, language and worldview play an essential role in effective cross-cultural communication in Christian missions.

Meanwhile, it is essential to learn more than their language; it is necessary to learn their customs, values, and various ways of thinking. As such, there is a need to understand the culture and context.

#### ***A. Culture in Cross-cultural Communication***

Culture in cross-cultural communication has to do with the language, practices, beliefs, values, and worldviews of the audience, which is relevant to effective communication. Effective communication within any culture requires an understanding of the ethical history of that

culture. It is possible for one to understand and be able to speak the language of a particular tribe. However, the ability to speak and understand the language cannot guaranty effective communication in that culture. There is a need to understand how history has taught the people of that culture to perceive themselves and others, an understanding of what the people regard as a culture will exhibit what they value and rejects. For instance, if a cross-cultural missionary travels to the Yoruba region in the southwest of Nigeria and never take cognisance of greeting and respecting in his approach to witnessing the Gospel to the people, such a missionary might not find it easy in reaching the people. The reason is that the Yoruba value greeting and respect. In other words, communication can only be effective when it conforms to the culture in which it is taking place.

Christian Missions deal with culture, not just communication. As such, knowing culture in communication will provide bridges to relate and share the message of the Gospel message effectively. In agreement, Hesselgrave (1991, p. 148), while discussing communication in cross-cultural mission in the aspect of integrity and credibility, opines that it is essential to “give consideration to the respondent culture and the ways in which it defines such things as integrity, credibility and goodwill.” Therefore, it is the receptor’s culture that defines the integrity and credibility of the speaker. In order words, culture has implication in communication. Kraft (1980, p. 272) further collaborates this view while examining the basic principle of communication and subscribe that “communication is most effective when the message is understood by the receptor to relate specifically to life as he/she lives it.” This is to say that communication in cross-culture must be in conformity with the culture.

### ***B. Context in Cross-Cultural Communication***

A Context is a geographical location; a belief shared in common, place, and standard practices peculiar to a certain group of people. Communication always takes place in context. A context is anything such as room, town, language, church, tradition that people share and which binds them together. In cross-cultural communication, context can be referred to as the shared understandings and traditions of a particular group of people. It can also refer to the geographical location of a particular people and the shared beliefs and practices of

a group of people. The importance of context in cross-cultural communication cannot be overemphasised. In agreement, Hughes (1998, p. 280) reiterates that “effective cross-cultural communication necessity takes place within a given context. Consequently, a cross-cultural missionary who successfully identifies with a particular people group in a particular context is well-positioned to make an impact in that situation with the gospel.” In this sense, it is essential for any missionary seeking to communicate the gospel in any context outside his/her own to adopt some form of identification with that culture. The reason is that people tend to listen to someone who shares their context. This can be likened to a situation where a foreign missionary is working among a group of people he/she shares and understand their values and practices. The people will be more likely to listen to him/her than one who does not. In other words, a missionary should understand the context of the people, such as their interest, pace of life, concern, and value. The context shared in communication is essential in cross-cultural missions.

Furthermore, sharing a person’s context enables a missionary to see things as the people see them and to begin to think as they do (*Ibid*). When a missionary demonstrates the ability to speak the language of a particular people and communicate through their worldviews, familiar terms and idea which the people understands and find meaningful, the possibility of their responding by believing and accepting the message is much greater. Kraft (1980, p. 148), asserts that missionary should present messages through cultural forms that stimulate within the receptors’ beads, meanings that shape into the message that he/she bears because meaning is not transmitted; only messages are transmittable. Meaning comes from the receptors mind through world views, experience, traditions and beliefs. In this sense, the context in which a message is being disseminated is as essential as the message itself. Therefore, the cross-cultural communicator should carry the meanings of the gospel to people personally in order to make the message plain to the receptor. The reason is that the audience is active participants in the communication process, processing the message in accordance with their needs, interests, and values (Hesselgrave & Rommen, 1989, p. 192).



### **Dynamics of Contextualized Theological Education for Transformative Missions**

Theological education is at the centre of Christianity. The notion that “as the seminary goes, so goes the church”, must be taken seriously even in Christian missions. The reason is that theological institutions determine the direction of missions. The theological lectures, seminars, textbooks, and programmes are the foundation on which missions is built (Manfred, 2009, p. 149). Theological education is vital and integral for the transmission of mission in the contemporary Africa communities. Missionaries and mission pastors put into practice what they are taught and pass on their knowledge and experience to people in their mission works or outreach ministries. It is therefore critical to contextualize the approach, content, and process of the modern theological education in order to effectively equip and prepare missionaries for the realities in the modern cross-cultural communication which will enable them to transform and communicate the Gospel message of light to the people who are in darkness and bring them into the marvellous light of God, revealed in Christ Jesus.

Thus, theological education which is the labour room where missionaries and mission pastors receive training for missional practice must therefore be obviously contextualized. Also, if it is to have any connection to the cross cultural missions, shaped by the *mission Dei*, then it must be approached through the lens of culture, worldviews and language of the people in their context. In other words, theological education should not just provide orientations for the study of the Bible, or church history, or practical theology, or any other theological subject, without constantly being and making students to be aware of its missiological implications to the group of people in their cultural setting. In practical terms, this means that theological education approach should be shaped in such a way that will provide adequate communication skills that will prepare students especially missionaries and mission pastors to communicate the Gospel message to target groups in their cultural, linguistic and worldview milieu. As such, a contextualized theological education is culturally oriented in content, worldview grounded in process, and linguistically relevant in approach.

### ***A. Culturally Oriented in Content***

What this means for theological education is that many of the modern missions fields or target groups are not just a place for “applied theology” learnt in the books and classrooms, instead a place where theology emerges from the ground. We went to the Egba Egbema/Ndomi Home Mission field few weeks ago, one of the students’ witnessed to a man during the One on One evangelism, and the man asked the student that “between Jesus Christ and their community idol, which one answer fast?” The reason why the man asked such a question was because according to him, “the idol answers them any time they called upon him.” As such, for the man, accepting Jesus Christ is not a matter of need, but a matter of the God who answer fast when called upon. In other words, it is a matter of a better God who is superior. In essence, engaging the content of the theological education in the culture and milieu of the target groups, will generate transformative ideas that will prepare missionaries on how to engage a target group. Therefore, cross-cultural communication in missions of the modern time needs a contextualized theological education that is reflective of and developed in view of the culture and context of a target group. In this condition, the content of theological education must constantly generate new ideas and frontiers to foster transformative cross-cultural communication in missions. Vinay and Sudgen (1982, p. 30) posits that:

Theological education has traditionally been guarding the deposit of faith but to guard the deposit is not necessarily the same as to defend it against questions raised in other cultures. The deposit can only be guarded as it is continually made relevant to its context for to guard the deposit without making it relevant to the context is in fact to sabotage the deposit.

In other words, the wisdom of cultural sensitivity should not be overlooked when developing the content of theological education. The content of theological education that is missional should always begin with the social context and culture of the contemporary target groups.

***B. Worldview Grounded in Process***

Many people in the contemporary society knowingly or unknowingly conduct their lives on the foundation of their worldview. Worldview is the picture people hold in their heart to determine how things work; how things relate to each other; what those things mean; what is most significant; and what constitutes meaning, loyalty, duty, faith and many other ideas (Ringenberg, 2003, p. vii). In Proverb 23:7 (KJV), the scripture discloses that “As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he.” Many people have formulated a philosophy of living that is based on survival needs, crisis, and numerous personal, family, religious, and political values. As such the process (that is, teaching and learning) in theological institutions should transform and integrate faith with the way people live their lives in the contemporary time. The process of theological education should integrate faith with the contemporary realities such as Japa syndrome, survival needs, personal and family values, political and religious crisis. Such integration takes place through classroom instruction, practical leadership and outreach opportunities and should be related to the subject matter of all courses. Students should be encouraged to think, act and make sound judgments in these matters of life and conduct. Making connections between faith, living and learning is a basic purpose of theological education. This will enable the student to relate faith with practical life in order to provide a conscious influence for Christ in the world.

***C. Linguistically Relevant in Approach***

The approach of the theological education should remain linguistically flexible in order to make it relate to the needs of the contemporary culture. Throughout known history, institutions have adjusted their curriculum to meet the needs of the time. The same type of educational and cultural sensitivity must be implemented in the contemporary time. While holding a grip on the academic excellence and credibility within the larger higher education community, theological education need to develop indigenous linguistic programmes concurrent with the needs of the mission fields or target groups. The language needs of mission fields or target groups are becoming more varied. This necessitates modifying the present approach to theological education. If theological education is going to affect the missional practice of the contemporary society

greatly, there is a need to develop a flexible delivery approach that demonstrates effectiveness with respect to the cultural context of a mission field or target groups. In this way, student could learn an indigenous language relevant to a mission field or target group. Also, such students could be sent on a mission trip to a mission field or target group relating to the language learnt to provide field based knowledge and familiarity with the culture of the people in that mission field or group. Therefore, theological education must maintain flexibility in order to remain relevant to the cultural and contextual needs of the contemporary mission fields and target groups.

### **Conclusion**

This study examines the dynamics of contextualized theological education towards transformative communication of the Gospel message by missionaries and mission pastors in mission fields or among target groups. Contextualization of the theological education has become a necessity in the contemporary time. This is due to the mandate to communicate the Gospel message to different people in different part of the world and as a result of emerging issues relating to culture, worldview and diversity of language in the contemporary society.

As such, it is critical and crucial to contextualize theological education in order to equip and provide necessary contextual skills and apparatuses to missionaries and mission pastors for transformative missional practice in the contemporary time. Likewise, theological institutions being the laboratory centre where missional practice is being shaped needs to be sensitive to the emerging issues, the theological content must constantly generate new ideas and frontiers to foster transformative cross-cultural communication in missions. Similarly, the process should make connections between faith, living and learning which will groom the students for transformative missions. Therefore, contextualized theological education is relevant for transformative communication of the Gospel in cross-cultural context.

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