



# **Cultural Awareness, Flexibility and Mission Engagement among Field Missionaries in Abia and Anambra States, Nigeria**

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## **Abstract**

Cross-cultural missionaries face numerous challenges in their place of assignment, leading to high rates of attrition, ineffectiveness, and shortened tenure. The study adopted descriptive survey research design and it involved twenty (20) cross-cultural field missionaries of New Life Gospel for All Nations Ministries working in Abia and Anambra states, Nigeria; who were purposive sampled as workers with mission certification training experience and, due to the peculiarity of attrition within the location of their mission fields. The instrument for data collection was an interview guide with predetermined sets of closed-ended questions. Data collected was analyzed using descriptive statistics with frequencies and percentages. Findings on cultural awareness revealed high prevalence rating as; Understanding and appreciation of the culture of the host community (100%), respect for cultural differences (100%), recognizing your own biases and stereotypes (100%), challenge your own biases and stereotypes (90%), navigated cultural misunderstanding (90%), and educate yourself in different cultural practices (90%). Again, finding further revealed the extent of flexibility; adapt to different situations (85%); adapt to different environments (90%), open to new ideas (75%), seek out opportunities to learn (90%), seek out opportunities to grow (80%), compromise and find common ground (75%) and adjust to communication style (90%). Findings suggested that cultural awareness and flexibility plays a crucial role in determining cross-cultural missionary retention, effectiveness and longevity. Findings underscore the importance of cultural awareness and flexibility in the success and longevity



of missionaries working in diverse cultural contexts. It was recommended that cross-cultural missionaries must engage in cultural immersion experiences to understand and appreciate the customs, traditions, and values of the local community. They must also be adaptable to changing circumstances and be willing to modify approaches based on local feedback. They must adjust their expectations and be prepared for unexpected challenges that may arise in a cross-cultural setting.

**Keywords:** Cross-Cultural Missionary, Missionary Attrition, Cultural Awareness, Flexibility, Intercultural Competence

## Introduction

Intercultural competence which includes; cultural awareness and flexibility are essential skills for cross-cultural missionaries working in the context of global perspective. They allow cross-cultural missionary to effectively navigate cultural differences, communicate their message effectively and respectfully, and build trust and rapport with the local communities of their place of assignment (Sternberg, 2023). Intercultural competence (cultural awareness and flexibility) is very important for cross-cultural missionaries working in Africa, as the continent is incredibly diverse, with a wide range of cultures, languages, and customs. Without the ability to navigate these cultural differences, missionaries may struggle to build relationships with the local population of their place of assignment, understand their needs, and effectively share the gospel. Intercultural competence (cultural awareness and flexibility) is particularly essential for cross-cultural missionaries working in Nigeria. Nigeria is a country with a diverse population made up of over 250 ethnic groups, each with their own languages, customs, and traditions (Oana-Antonia, 2019). Without the ability to navigate these cultural differences, missionaries may struggle to effectively communicate with local people, build relationships, and understand their needs (Owoade, 2023).

Cross-cultural missionary attrition has been identified as a significant challenge facing the mission work and the cross-cultural missionary themselves. Missionary attrition is the rate at which cross-cultural missionaries are suddenly leaving their mission fields and going back to their various homes. Missionary attrition not only has a negative impact



on the individual missionaries and their families but also on the effectiveness of mission work as a whole (Sternberg, 2023).

Cross-cultural missionaries with intercultural competence (cultural awareness and flexibility) effective in adapting to the local culture and customs of the people they are working with, which can help to build trust and rapport with the local communities. This, in turn, can help to promote understanding and tolerance between cultures, which is essential for the success of missionary work (Alexandria, 2022).

### **Contextualization of Intercultural Competence and Cross-Cultural Missionary Work**

Having intercultural competence as a missionary in Nigeria involves several key aspects:

- 1) Cultural Awareness:** Missionaries need to have a deep understanding of the cultural diversity and nuances within Nigeria. This includes familiarizing themselves with the language, history, traditions, and religious beliefs of the specific communities they aim to work with. This knowledge will enable them to approach their missionary work with sensitivity and respect (Sierra-Huedo & Nevado-Llopis 2022).
- 2) Adaptability:** Cross-cultural missionary work often requires flexibility and adaptability. Missionaries should be open to learning and incorporating local customs and practices into their approach. This not only helps in building trust and rapport but also shows a genuine interest in the well-being of the community. Adapting to local norms can also aid in contextualizing the message and making it more relatable to the local population (Sierra-Huedo & Nevado-Llopis 2022).

Intercultural competence is vital for cross-cultural missionaries in Nigeria. It enables them to navigate cultural differences, communicate effectively, and build meaningful relationships with the diverse population they serve. By embracing cultural awareness, developing strong communication skills, and being adaptable, missionaries can enhance their effectiveness in spreading their message and positively impacting the communities they work with (Cressy, 2021).

### **Indicators of Intercultural Competence: Cultural Awareness as an Indicator of Intercultural Competence**



In today's increasingly globalized world, cultural awareness plays a crucial role in promoting effective communication and understanding between individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. Developing intercultural competence is vital for fostering positive relationships and collaboration across cultures (Rodríguez-Izquierdo, 2022). The followings are the components of cultural awareness as an indicator of intercultural competence:

- 1) **Definition and Components of Cultural Awareness:** Cultural awareness refers to the ability to recognize, understand, and appreciate the values, beliefs, customs, and behaviors of different cultures. It encompasses a range of factors, including knowledge of cultural practices, empathy, open-mindedness, and self-reflection. This awareness allows individuals to approach intercultural encounters with respect and sensitivity (Rodríguez-Izquierdo, 2022).
- 2) **Cultural Awareness as the Foundation of Intercultural Competence:** Cultural awareness is a fundamental building block for intercultural competence. It provides individuals with the necessary understanding of diverse cultural perspectives, values, and norms. Through cultural awareness, individuals can recognize and appreciate similarities and differences, which forms the basis for effective cross-cultural communication and collaboration (Rodríguez-Izquierdo, 2022).
- 3) **Enhancing Intercultural Competence through Cultural Awareness:** Cultural awareness enhances intercultural competence in several ways:
  - a. **Improved Communication:** Cultural awareness enables individuals to adapt their communication styles, taking into account cultural nuances such as non-verbal cues, directness, and tone. This adaptability promotes effective dialogue and minimizes misunderstandings (Rodríguez-Izquierdo, 2022).
  - b. **Enhanced Empathy:** Understanding different cultural perspectives fosters empathy, enabling individuals to appreciate alternative viewpoints and navigate diverse social contexts with sensitivity. This empathy forms the basis for building trust and forming strong intercultural relationships (Rodríguez-Izquierdo, 2022).
  - c. **Mitigation of Stereotypes:** Cultural awareness challenges preconceived notions and stereotypes by exposing individuals to accurate information about diverse cultures. This helps break



down barriers and promotes a more inclusive and accepting mindset.

To navigate today's increasingly interconnected world, developing intercultural competence is essential. Cultural awareness serves as a foundational element for building intercultural competence. It allows for effective communication, understanding, and the ability to challenge stereotypes, ultimately fostering meaningful connections and collaborations between individuals from different cultural backgrounds. By valuing cultural awareness as an indicator of intercultural competence, we can promote a more inclusive and harmonious global society (Rodríguez-Izquierdo, 2022).

### Limitations of Cultural Awareness as an Indicator of Intercultural Competence

Intercultural competence is vital in today's globalized world, as it enables individuals to effectively navigate and communicate across different cultural contexts. However, by solely relying on cultural awareness as an indicator of intercultural competence have its own limitations (Sercu, 2023).

- 1) **Insufficient Practical Application:** Merely understanding different cultural norms, traditions, and values is not sufficient for effective intercultural communication. Practical application of this knowledge is necessary. As a scholar argues, intercultural competence involves the ability to appropriately adjust communication styles, behavior, and attitudes to suit specific cultural contexts (Sercu, 2023).
- 2) **Inadequate Understanding of Individual Differences:** Cultural awareness tends to focus on generalizations about a particular group's culture. However, it overlooks the vast diversity that exists within cultures. Neglecting individual differences and over-relying on generalizations can lead to misunderstandings and stereotyping. A researcher suggests, understanding culture on a deeper level involves recognizing the unique experiences, perspectives, and identities of individuals within a cultural group (Rodríguez-Izquierdo, 2022).
- 3) **Limited Scope of Cultural Awareness:** Cultural awareness often concentrates on knowledge about visible cultural aspects such as language, customs, and traditions. While this understanding is valuable, it may not capture the nuanced, deeper layers of cultural identity, values, and beliefs. Two scholars working together



emphasize the importance of going beyond surface-level awareness to grasp the underlying foundations of cultural dynamics (Rodríguez-Izquierdo, 2022).

## The Need for a Comprehensive Approach for Cultural Awareness as an Indicator of Intercultural Competence

While cultural awareness is unquestionably important, it alone cannot fully capture the complexity of intercultural competence. The limitations of cultural awareness include insufficient practical application, inadequate understanding of individual differences, and its limited scope. To develop true intercultural competence, individuals must also cultivate intercultural sensitivity and enhance their communication skills. By acknowledging these limitations and adopting a comprehensive approach, individuals can strive for more effective intercultural communication and understanding (Adams, A. 2019).

- 1) **Intercultural Sensitivity:** Intercultural competence requires more than surface-level awareness; it necessitates intercultural sensitivity. By being mindful of cultural differences, recognizing biases, and demonstrating empathy, individuals can better adapt to various cultural contexts. Intercultural sensitivity enables individuals to understand the perspectives of others and respond appropriately (Woicolesco, et al., 2022).
- 2) **Communication Skills:** In addition to cultural awareness, individuals need strong communication skills to effectively engage in intercultural interactions. Active listening, effective verbal and nonverbal communication, and the ability to navigate through conflicts are crucial. Two researchers emphasize the importance of developing these skills to enhance intercultural competence (Woicolesco, et al., 2022).

## Flexibility as an Indicator of Intercultural Competence

Intercultural competence has become a vital skill in various domains, including business, education, and diplomacy. Among the many attributes associated with intercultural competence, flexibility stands out as a key indicator of one's ability to adapt and thrive in multicultural settings (Dong, et al., 2024).

- 1) **Definition and Importance of Flexibility in Intercultural Competence:** Flexibility is the capacity to adjust one's thoughts,



behaviors, and perceptions in response to diverse cultural contexts. It encompasses open-mindedness, adaptability, and a willingness to embrace new and different ideas and practices. Intercultural competence relies heavily on flexibility as it allows individuals to navigate the complexities of cultural differences and build meaningful connections (Metin, 2021).

- 2) **Adaptability in Cross-Cultural Situations:** Being flexible is crucial in adapting to unfamiliar cultural practices, norms, and values. This includes adjusting communication styles, recognizing non-verbal cues, and understanding cultural nuances. By being flexible, individuals can reduce misunderstandings, bridge communication gaps, and build trust and rapport with people from different cultures (Metin, 2021).
- 3) **Openness to New Perspectives:** Flexibility also entails being receptive to diverse viewpoints and being willing to challenge one's own assumptions and biases. By embracing multiple perspectives, individuals with intercultural competence can foster understanding and collaboration across cultures. This openness leads to innovative thinking and problem-solving, contributing to both personal and professional growth (Metin, 2021).
- 4) **Emotional Intelligence and Flexibility:** Flexibility requires emotional intelligence, which involves understanding and managing emotions, both within oneself and in others. Emotional intelligence enables individuals to perceive, understand, and respond appropriately to emotional cues from different cultural backgrounds. By being flexible in emotional expression and regulation, individuals demonstrate respect and empathy, fostering stronger intercultural relationships (Metin, 2021).
- 5) **Continuous Learning and Development:** Flexibility as an indicator of intercultural competence also encompasses a commitment to continuous learning and self-reflection. Cultivating cultural sensitivity and understanding is an ongoing process that requires individuals to engage in self-directed learning, seek feedback, and reflect on their experiences. Through continuous learning, individuals can enhance their intercultural competence and adapt to ever-evolving cultural dynamics (Metin, 2021). Flexibility plays a significant role as an indicator of intercultural competence. The ability to adapt, embrace different perspectives, and actively engage in ongoing learning are core elements of





flexibility. By being flexible, individuals can successfully navigate and bridge cultural differences, leading to effective communication, collaboration, and meaningful connections with people from diverse backgrounds. Developing and honing flexibility is instrumental in fostering intercultural competence in an increasingly multicultural world (Metin, 2021).

## The Limitations of Flexibility as an Indicator of Intercultural Competence

Intercultural competence refers to the ability to interact effectively and appropriately with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. It involves a range of skills, knowledge, and attitudes that enable individuals to understand, appreciate, and adapt to different cultural contexts. While flexibility is considered one of the key indicators of intercultural competence and by examining the constraints associated with flexibility, we can gain a deeper understanding of the complexity of intercultural competence (Andrea, et al, 2023).

- 1) **Cultural Awareness and Sensitivity:** Flexibility alone may not guarantee cultural awareness and sensitivity. Intercultural competence goes beyond adapting to different situations; it requires individuals to have a profound understanding and empathy towards diverse cultures. Embracing cultural differences and avoiding ethnocentrism are crucial components of intercultural competence that cannot be fully captured by flexibility. Therefore, relying solely on flexibility can lead to an oversimplified understanding of intercultural competence (Andrea, et al, 2023).
- 2) **Deep Cultural Knowledge:** Flexibility may also fall short in providing individuals with the necessary depth of cultural knowledge. Effective intercultural interactions often require a solid foundation of understanding cultural norms, values, beliefs, and practices. Merely adapting to different cultural contexts without adequate knowledge and understanding can result in superficial interactions or unintentional cultural misunderstandings. Thus, flexibility should be accompanied by cross-cultural knowledge to enable individuals to navigate intercultural encounters effectively (Hong, 2021).
- 3) **Emotional and Communication Skills:** Flexibility does not fully address the emotional and communication skills necessary for intercultural competence. Effective intercultural communication requires individuals to be attentive listeners, skilled in managing





conflicts, and capable of navigating non-verbal cues. These skills go beyond being flexible and demand a higher level of emotional intelligence and communication competence. Hence, focusing solely on flexibility may overlook these important aspects of intercultural competence (Adams, 2019).

- 4) Cultural Sensitivity and Adaptation:** Lastly, flexibility may inadvertently reinforce cultural adaptation biases. By emphasizing flexibility alone, there is a risk of expecting individuals from non-dominant cultures to adapt and conform to the norms of the dominant culture. This can perpetuate power imbalances and hinder genuine intercultural understanding. A comprehensive indicator of intercultural competence should consider both the ability to adapt and the recognition and appreciation of diverse cultural perspectives. While flexibility is essential in intercultural communication, it is insufficient as a comprehensive indicator of intercultural competence. The limitations outlined above highlight the need for a multifaceted approach that encompasses cultural awareness, knowledge, emotional intelligence, and communication skills. By understanding, appreciating, and adapting to diverse cultures require a more nuanced approach that transcends mere adaptability. By recognizing and addressing these limitations, individuals can develop a deeper understanding of intercultural competence and contribute to more effective cross-cultural interactions (Adams, 2019).

## Review of Empirical Studies

Schauer (2020) substantiated through a study on “Enhancing Cross-Cultural Missionary Retention: The Role of Cultural Awareness and Intercultural Competence” The study affirm that cross-cultural missionary work involves interaction with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. To ensure successful engagement, it is crucial for missionaries to possess cultural awareness and develop intercultural competence. Below are the modalities mentioned:

- 1) Cultural Awareness in Cross-Cultural Missionary Retention:** Cultural awareness, also referred to as cultural sensitivity, represents an individual's knowledge and recognition of their own cultural values and beliefs, as well as an appreciation of the customs and behaviors of other cultures. This awareness plays a fundamental role in cross-cultural missionary retention (Schauer, 2020).



- 2) **Enhancing Understanding:** Understanding and appreciating the cultural values and beliefs of the local community allows missionaries to build stronger relationships, thereby increasing the likelihood of retention. Cultural awareness fosters empathy and compassion, minimizing the potential for misunderstandings and conflicts (Schauer, 2020).
- 3) **Effective Communication:** Cross-cultural missionaries who possess cultural awareness can effectively navigate communication barriers, both verbal and nonverbal. By recognizing cultural nuances in communication styles, nonverbal cues, and language usage, missionaries can adapt their communication strategies to be more effective, thereby improving their ability to connect with the local community (Schauer, 2023).
- 4) **Building Trust and Relationships:** Retaining cross-cultural missionaries often relies on building trust and establishing strong relationships within the community. Intercultural competence allows missionaries to navigate cultural differences, demonstrate respect, and avoid unintentional offenses, leading to greater trust and acceptance (Schauer, 2020).
- 5) **Conflict Resolution and Adaptability:** Intercultural competence equips missionaries with skills to manage conflicts and adapt to the host culture's customs and practices (Schauer, 2020). Resolving conflicts arising from cultural clashes does promote higher retention rates by fostering a more harmonious and productive working environment (Schauer, 2023).

Papadopoulos, et al., (2022) also wrote extensively on the topic “importance of cultural awareness and intercultural competence” and ascertained that cultural awareness and intercultural competence mutually reinforce each other, contributing to improved cross-cultural missionary retention. By developing competencies in these areas, missionaries can enhance their effectiveness, job satisfaction, and overall well-being during their cross-cultural service.

Papadopoulos, et al., (2022) went further by writing that cultural awareness and intercultural competence are vital for cross-cultural missionary retention. By recognizing, respecting, and adapting to diverse cultural differences, missionaries can build stronger relationships, communicate effectively, and resolve conflicts with the local community. In this way, maintaining focus on cultural awareness and intercultural competence acts as a catalyst for successful



engagement and long-term commitment. Future studies should continue to explore and develop strategies to enhance cultural awareness and intercultural competence within the context of cross-cultural missionary work (Papadopoulou, et al., 2022).

Pavel, (2020) corroborated the arguments through the study on “flexibility and intercultural competence for cross-cultural missionary retention” by saying that successful missionary work in cross-cultural settings necessitates the cultivation of two crucial skills: flexibility and intercultural competence. The importance of these skills for missionary retention did emphasizing their role in establishing effective cross-cultural relationships and facilitating meaningful engagement with diverse communities. The modalities mentioned are as follows:

- 1) **Flexibility in Cross-Cultural Missionary Work:** Flexibility is the ability to adapt to new and changing circumstances, a trait that is particularly relevant in cross-cultural settings. Flexibility allows missionaries to adjust their approaches, perspectives, and strategies, enabling them to navigate unfamiliar cultural terrain more effectively. One key aspect of flexibility is the willingness to embrace ambiguity and uncertainty (Owoade, 2023), which allows missionaries to respond to unexpected challenges and cultural nuances with grace and understanding (Pavel, 2020).
- 2) **Intercultural Competence in Cross-Cultural Missionary Work:** Intercultural competence refers to the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to engage with diverse cultures in respectful and effective ways. This competence involves empathy, cultural sensitivity, and a capacity for effective communication. Intercultural competence equips missionaries to understand and appreciate cultural differences, fostering trust and collaboration within multicultural communities (Owoade, 2023). It also helps avoid cultural misunderstandings and conflicts that can impede missionary effectiveness (Pavel, 2020).
- 3) **The Relationship between Flexibility and Intercultural Competence:** Flexibility and intercultural competence are closely interconnected in cross-cultural missionary work. The ability to adapt and remain open-minded allows missionaries to continuously learn and enhance their intercultural competence. Flexibility enables missionaries to embrace new perspectives, challenge preconceived notions, and adjust their behavior to effectively navigate cultural diversity (Owoade, 2023). Conversely, developing intercultural



competence provides a foundation for embracing flexibility and adapting to evolving cultural realities (Pavel, 2020).

- 4) **Enhancing Cross-Cultural Missionary Retention:** Flexibility and intercultural competence significantly contribute to missionary retention in cross-cultural contexts. The ability to navigate cultural challenges and maintain effective relationships fosters long-term commitment and sustainable engagement. Missionaries with higher flexibility and intercultural competence exhibited greater resilience, adaptability, and overall satisfaction in their work (Owoade, 2023). By honing these skills, missionaries can build stronger connections with the communities they serve, leading to improved sustained impact. Flexibility and intercultural competence are essential skills for cross-cultural missionary retention. They empower missionaries to adapt to new cultural landscapes, build meaningful relationships, and effectively engage with diverse communities (Owoade, 2023). The interconnectedness of flexibility and intercultural competence highlights the importance of cultivating both skills simultaneously. By developing and nurturing these qualities, missionaries can navigate the complexities of cross-cultural missionary work, leading to increased retention, improved effectiveness, and greater long-term impact (Owoade, 2023).

### **Statement of the Problem**

The research problem identified is the relationship between intercultural competence and cross-cultural missionary retention. The gaps in the literature that was addressed in this thesis include a lack of comprehensive studies on how intercultural competence influences missionary retention rates. The key objectives of the study are to ascertain how cultural awareness impacts missionary retention and ascertain the importance of flexibility in enhancing missionary longevity. Focusing on these objectives and addressing the gaps in the existing literatures, the aim of this paper has provided valuable insights into the relationship between intercultural competence and cross-cultural missionary retention. This research has the potential to enhance the reader's understanding of the factors that influence missionary success in diverse cultural environments and inform strategies to improve retention rates in cross-cultural missionary work.



## **Aim and Objectives of the Study**

The aim of this study is to examine cultural awareness, flexibility and missions engagement of field missionaries in Abia and Anambra States, Nigeria.

The specific objectives of the study were to:

- i. ascertain the level of awareness of the culture of the host communities among field missionaries involved in cross-cultural missions of New Life Gospel for all Nations Ministries in Abia and Anambra states, Nigeria.
- ii. ascertain the extent to which field missionaries are flexible in their cross-cultural missions engagement under New Life Gospel for All Nations Ministries in Abia and Anambra states, Nigeria.

## **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the study:

- i. what is the level of awareness of the culture of the host communities among field missionaries involved in cross-cultural missions of New Life Gospel for all Nations Ministries in Abia and Anambra states, Nigeria.
- ii. what is the extent to which field missionaries are flexible in their cross-cultural missions engagement under New Life Gospel for All Nations Ministries in Abia and Anambra states, Nigeria.

## **Methodology**

This research adopted descriptive survey research design. This affords the researcher in gathering data from a large number of respondents on events or activities that have taken place in retrospect. The design is fit for the study because the researcher is only interested in gathering data on respondents' experiences. New Life Gospel for All Nations Ministries comprised of 12 Zones in Nigeria with the Headquarters at International Camping Ground located at Oloola, in Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria. The population for this study comprised all the fifty (50) cross-cultural missionaries of New Life Gospel for All Nations Ministries working in Abia and Anambra states in Nigeria. The cross-cultural missionaries working in Abia and Anambra State mission fields of the New Life Gospel for All Nations Ministries were of two categories namely: 1) those without formal training; and 2) those with mission certification training experiences. Purposive sampling technique was adopted to select twenty



(20) cross-cultural missionaries (those working with mission certification training experience under the New Life Gospel for all Nations Ministries in Abia and Anambra states, Nigeria), due to the peculiarity of attrition of their mission fields (Details has presented in Table 1). The instruments for the data collection for this research are questionnaire and interview. A predetermined set of open-ended questions were used to collect data from the respondents, through interviews. The instrument called; Intercultural Competences and Cross-cultural Missionary Retention Question (InCoCcMiReQ) was developed by the researcher and used to gather data for the study. The instrument was completed by the twenty (20) cross-cultural missionaries (with mission certification experience training experiences) working in the Abia and Anambra State in Nigeria. The researcher, in an attempt to reduce the numbers of non-respondent and to enhance proper data collection, used the interview guide to carry out the interview with the participants, for the data collection for this research.

Data collected was analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) and thematic analysis.

**Table 1: Demographic Information of the Respondents**

S/N	Variable		Frequencies	Percentage
1.	Gender	Male	20	100.0%
		Female		0%
2	Age	10 – 20 Years	0	0%
		21 – 30 Years	0	0%
		31 – 40 Years	0	10 %
		41 – 50 Years	5	30 %
		51 – 60 Years	9	25 %
		61 – 70 Years	6	35 %
3	Year of Service	0 – 5 Years	0	0 %
		6 – 10 Years	1	5 %
		11 – 20 Years	4	20 %
		21 – 30 Years	10	50 %
		31 – 40 Years	4	20 %



4	Marital Status	41 – 50 Years	1	5%
		Married	20	100%
5	Mission Certification	Single	0	0%
		Divorce	0	0%
		With Mission Certification	10	50%
		Experience		
6	Working Status	Without formal training	10	50%
		Full-Time	20	100%
		Part-Time	0	0%
7	Nationality	Nigeria	20	100%
		Non-Nigeria	0	0%

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**Source:** Researchers' Fieldwork 2024

Table 1 presents the demographic information of the respondents. The table revealed that the gender of the respondents was only male with 100%; and it also revealed that the age range distribution of the respondents, the table revealed that 10 % were of 31 – 40 years, while 30 % were of 41–50 years and 25 % were 51–60 years, and 35 % were 61–70 years respectively. In addition, the table also revealed the years of service of the respondents: 50% of the respondents were of 21-30 years of service, 20% were of both 11-20 & 31-40 years of service, 5% were of both 6–10 & 41-50 years of service respectively. The table also revealed that the marital status of the respondents was only married with 100%. The table revealed that the Mission Certification of the respondents was 50% with Mission Certification Experience and 50% without formal training respectively. The table also revealed that the working status of the respondents was 100% working on full-time basis only and that all the respondents were 100% nationality of Nigeria.





## Results and Discussion of Findings

Results and discussion of findings are presented according to the research questions as follows:

**Research Question One:** What is the level of awareness of the culture of the host community of the mission field of cross-cultural missionaries in New Life Gospel for all Nations Ministries in Abia and Anambra States, Nigeria?

**Table 2: Level of awareness of the culture of the host community of the mission field of cross-cultural missionary in New Life Gospel for all Nations Ministries in Abia and Anambra States, Nigeria**

S/ N	Statements	Yes	No	Not Sure	Remarks
1	Do you actively sought to understand and appreciate a culture different from your own?	20 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	Very High
2	Do you demonstrate respect for cultural differences in your daily interactions with others?	20 (100.0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0.0%)	Very High
3	Are you able to recognize your own biases and stereotypes when engaging with people from different cultures?	20 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	Very High
4	Are you able to challenge your own biases and stereotypes when	18 (90.0%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (10.0%)	Very High



	engaging with people from different cultures?				
5	Have you successfully navigated a cultural misunderstanding or miscommunication?	18 (90.0%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (10.0%)	Very High
6	Is it necessary to educate yourself about different cultural practices, traditions, and customs?	18 (90.0%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (10.0%)	Very High

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**Source:** Researchers' Fieldwork 2024

Table 2 presents finding on research question one with regards to the level of cultural of field missionaries' of New Life Gospel for all Nations Ministries in Abia and Anambra States, Nigeria. The exhibited cultural awareness includes ability to recognize and understand the different customs, beliefs, and practices of various cultural groups. Table 4.2 show the level awareness of the culture of the host communities among field missionaries involved in cross-cultural missions of New Life Gospel for all Nations Ministries in Abia and Anambra states, Nigeria. Table 2; revealed that the Understanding and appreciation of culture (100%), Respect for cultural differences (100%), Recognizing your own biases and stereotypes (100%), Challenge your own biases and stereotypes (90%), navigated cultural misunderstanding (90%), and educate yourself in different cultural practices (90%). Therefore, the mean of the percentages is  $=100+100+100+90+90+90 = 570/6 = 95\%$ . Finding on research question one revealed that there is high level (95%) of awareness of the culture of the host communities among field missionaries involved in cross-cultural missions of New Life Gospel for All Nations ministries in Abia and Anambra states in Nigeria.



**Research Question Two:** What is the extent of flexibility among the cross-cultural missionaries of New Life Gospel for All Nations Ministries in Abia and Anambra States, Nigeria?

**Table 3: The extent of flexibility among the cross-cultural missionaries of New Life Gospel for All Nations Ministries in Abia and Anambra States, Nigeria**

S/N	Statements	Yes	No	Not Su	Remarks
1	Can you adapt to different situations with ease?	17 (85%)	0 (0%)	3 (15%)	Very High
2	Can you adapt to different environments with ease?	18 (90%)	0 (0%)	2 (10%)	Very High
3	Are you open to new ideas on how to handle unexpected changes or disruptions to your plans?	15 (75%)	0 (0%)	5 (25%)	Very High
4	Do you actively seek out opportunities to learn outside of your comfort zone?	18 (90%)	0 (0%)	2 (10%)	Very High
5	Do you actively seek out opportunities to grow outside of your comfort zone?	16 (80%)	2 (10%)	2 (10%)	Very High
6	Are you able to compromise and find common ground when faced with conflicting opinions?	15 (75%)	1 (5%)	4 (20%)	Very High
7	Can you adjust your communication style	18 (90%)	0 (0%)	2 (10%)	Very High



to effectively interact  
with people from  
diverse backgrounds  
or cultures?

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**Source:** Researchers' Fieldwork 2024

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Table 3 presents finding on research question two with regards to the extent of flexibility among the cross-cultural missionaries of New Life Gospel for All Nations Ministries in Abia and Anambra States, Nigeria. The extent of flexibility includes ability to adapt and adjust easily to new situations or changes.

Table 3 show the extent to which field missionaries are flexible in their cross-cultural missions engagement under New Life Gospel for All Nations Ministries in Abia and Anambra states, Nigeria. The table revealed that Adapt to different situations (85%), Adapt to different environments (90%), Open to new ideas (75%), Seek out opportunities to learn (90%), Seek out opportunities to grow (80%), Compromise and find common ground (75%), and Adjust your communication style (90%). Therefore, the mean of the percentages is =  $85+90+75+90+80+75 = 495/6 = 82.5\%$ .

Finding on research question two revealed that there is very high (82.5%) flexibilities among the field missionaries engagement that are involved in cross-cultural mission under New Life Gospel for All Nations ministries in Abia and Anambra states in Nigeria.

### Discussion of Findings

Finding on research question one revealed that there is high level (95%) of awareness of the culture of the host communities of field missionaries involved in cross-cultural missions of New Life Gospel for All Nations ministries in Abia and Anambra states in Nigeria. Further, finding from the oral interview conducted also aligned with the finding on research question one, as its in agreement with the comments of respondents, that the missionaries has gotten a high level of cultural awareness (i.e.) they actively sought to understand and appreciate a culture different from their own; demonstrate respect for cultural differences in their daily interactions with others; able to recognize their own biases and stereotypes when engaging with people from different cultures; able to



challenge their own biases and stereotypes when engaging with people from different cultures; successfully navigated a cultural misunderstanding or miscommunication, and find it necessary to educate themselves about different cultural practices, traditions, and customs.

Finding on research question one is in congruent with (Schauer, 2023), who wrote that cultural awareness, also referred to as cultural sensitivity, represents an individual's knowledge and recognition of their own cultural values and beliefs, as well as an appreciation of the customs and behaviors of other cultures. Thus, awareness plays a fundamental role in cross-cultural missionary retention Papadopoulou, et al., (2022). Finding on research question two revealed that there is very high (82.5%) flexibilities among the field missionaries engagement that are involved in cross-cultural mission under New Life Gospel for All Nations ministries in Abia and Anambra states in Nigeria. Again, the oral interview conducted aligned with the finding on research question two, as its in agreement with the comments of respondents, that the missionaries has gotten a high extent of flexibility (i.e.) they can adapt to different situations with ease; can adapt to different environments with ease; open to new ideas on how to handle unexpected changes or disruptions to their plans; open to new ideas on how to handle unexpected changes or disruptions to their plans; actively seek out opportunities to learn outside of their comfort zone; actively seek out opportunities to grow outside of their comfort zone; able to compromise and find common ground when faced with conflicting opinions; and can adjust their communication style to effectively interact with people from diverse backgrounds or cultures. This has also revealed the reasons for them still been remaining at their places of assignment as at the time the researcher conducted the interview. The writings of Owoade (2023) and Pavel (2020) aligned with the finding in research question three, that, successful missionary work in cross-cultural settings necessitates the cultivation of two crucial skills: flexibility and intercultural competence. Owoade, (2023) and Papadopoulou, et al., (2022) also wrote on the importance of these skills for missionary retention, emphasizing their role in establishing effective cross-cultural relationships and facilitating meaningful engagement with diverse communities



## **Conclusion**

The research findings suggest that intercultural competence (cultural awareness and flexibility) plays a crucial role in determining cross-cultural missionary retention. The findings underscore the importance of these factors in the success and longevity of missionaries working in diverse cultural contexts. These findings did inform training programs and support systems aimed at improving missionary retention rates in cross-cultural settings. The results indicated that missionaries who possess strong intercultural skills (cultural awareness and flexibility) are more likely to succeed in their roles and stay committed to their missions. These insights emphasize the importance of prioritizing intercultural training and support systems to enhance missionary retention, effectiveness and longevity of missionaries working in diverse cultural contexts in cross-cultural settings.

## **Recommendations**

For cross-cultural missionaries to enhance intercultural competence and improve missionary retention: By prioritizing cultural awareness and flexibility, cross-cultural missionaries can enhance their intercultural competence, foster meaningful connections with the local community, and ultimately contribute to improved missionary retention, effectiveness and longevity of missionaries working in diverse cultural contexts in cross-cultural settings.

- 1)** Cross-cultural missionary must engage in cultural immersion experiences to understand and appreciate the customs, traditions, and values of the local community. They must attend language classes to communicate effectively and show respect for the native language. The field missionaries must also study the history and socio-cultural dynamics of the local community to grasp the context in which they will be operating.
- 2)** Cross-cultural missionary must be adaptable to changing circumstances and be willing to modify approaches based on local feedback. The field missionaries must embrace uncertainty and be open to trying new methods of engaging with the community. They must adjust their expectations and be prepared for unexpected challenges that may arise in a cross-cultural setting.



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