

EFFECTIVE CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION OF THE GOSPEL: A CASE STUDY IN NIGER

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Abstract

This study explores the cognitive, affective and evaluative communication skills of cross-cultural missionaries in their effort to spread the Gospel and encourage a genuine conversion. An assessment was conducted with 45 Brazilian interdenominational missionaries, 14 males and 31 females, who lived in Niger, West Africa, between 2003 and 2013. All participants answered a structured questionnaire with 75 questions aiming at evaluating cross-cultural communication effectiveness.

After verifying the results of the assessment and reviewing literature and the Bible on cross-cultural communication, the conclusive data analysis indicates that cross-cultural communicators are more efficient in decreasing and even preventing conflicts if they understand the concept of high and low cultural contexts, especially, if they know the differences between the two.

Findings reveal four factors contributing for effectiveness in cross-cultural communication of the Gospel: (i) the focus on the person and their basic needs, (ii) the liquid leadership, which is an adaptation of the message without changing its essence, (iii) the critical contextualization of the message, which seeks a coherent understanding of new information, and (iv) the chronological teaching method, which is the most appropriate process to teach new concepts.

Keywords: Niger, Leadership; Cross-cultural; Communication; Gospel; Mission

1. Introduction

Burkina Faso, Mali, Algeria, Libya, Chad, Benin, and Nigeria. In 2014, the estimated population was 19.9 million, distributed among a dozen ethnic groups. Islam is strongly influenced by traditional animism while

Christians face the daily challenge of giving a good testimony and resisting the pressure of living in a country with a Muslim majority.¹

Between years 2003 and 2013, more than 40 missionaries from Brazil served their respective evangelical missions in Niger causing a strong impact and deserves Missiological research on how skilled they were to communicate cross-culturally. Most of them worked as teachers and health agents in different villages and communities.²

One of the first words a foreigner learns in Niger is *fofo*³, which means “hi” in *Zarma*, one of the main dialects of *Songhai*, with two million speakers in Niger, Nigeria and Burkina Faso⁴. Regardless of age or status, it is common to see two men greeting each other by using this term and walking around holding each other’s hands, and sometimes even interlacing their little fingers, talking comfortably and demonstrating that they are good confidants. One of the meanings of the word *fofo* in Portuguese is used to address someone who is cute, adorable, sweet, lovely, darling or charming⁵. Imagine how uncomfortable it is for a Brazilian man to greet his fellow man with a word that means cute, sweet or charming, holding his hands and interlacing their fingers intimately, almost romantically, and walking in the streets. This is just one example of the challenge of living in a cross-cultural context and the requirement to understand the meaning of friendship forms of expressions in order to communicate effectively.

1.1 Delimitation of Study

The 21st century is characterized by globalization, which has increased the importance of international public relations and requires understanding of cross-cultural communication for organizations of all types. “Not understanding a culture appears to be the most common mistake by

¹ World Population Review, “Niger Population 2015,” accessed 28 July 2015, <http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/niger-population>.

² União.net, “Niamey, Niger,” accessed 28 July 2015, <http://www.uniao.net.com/africanigerniantania.htm>.

³ Dico Fraters, “*Cawyaŋ Zarma Sanni*,” accessed 11 June 2015, http://www.djerma.nl/zarma_en/textbook/lesson_02.html.

⁴ Abdourahmane Idrissa and Samuel Decalo, “Zarma,” *The Historical Dictionary of Niger*, 4th ed. (Toronto: The Scarecrow, 2012), 475.

⁵ *Dicionário de sinônimos online*, “fofo,” accessed 11 June 2015, <http://www.sinonimos.com.br/fofo>.

governments, corporation, and NGOs that contributes to the failure of communication.”⁶

During the seven years that I lived with my family in Niger, I have learned that successful cross-cultural communication is the ability to effectively form, nurture, and improve relationships with members of a culture different from mine. It is based on knowledge of many factors, such as the other culture’s values, perceptions, manners, social structure, and decision-making practices, and an understanding of how members of the group communicate verbally, non-verbally, in person, in writing, and in various business and social contexts, to name but a few.

According to Jones, “Like speaking a foreign language or riding a bicycle, cross-cultural communication involves a skill component that may best be learned and mastered through instruction and practice: simply reading about it is not enough.”⁷

Goman affirms that “communicating across cultures is challenging. Each culture has set rules that its members take for granted. Few of us are aware of our own cultural biases because cultural imprinting begins at a very early age. While some of a culture’s knowledge, rules, beliefs, values, phobias, and anxieties are taught explicitly, most of the information is absorbed subconsciously.”⁸

Ignorance of contexts usually leads to misunderstanding and conflicts. Living in a different cultural context demands patience to learn the obvious meanings and the connotative meanings in the process of communication. Misunderstandings in cross-cultural mission may lead new converts to a religious experience mixed up with syncretistic religious practices or double allegiance.

It can be problematic when an individual from a low-context culture background communicates to individuals of high-context culture background. However, it can be far worse when individuals belonging to different high-context cultures try to communicate as codes, gestures, symbols, and feeling may not be expressed similarly and with the same meaning.

⁶ Ansgar Zerfass, Betteke van Ruler and Krishnamurthy Sriramesh, *Public Relations Research* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag, 2008), 475, accessed 19 June 2015, <https://books.google.co.za/books?id=eNYdBAAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false>.

⁷ Steven D. Jones, “What is Cross-Cultural Communication,” *East-West Business Strategies*, accessed 15 April 2015, <http://www.ewbs.com/descr.html>.

⁸ Carol K. Goman, “Communication Across Cultures,” *American Management Association* (March 2011): para. 1, accessed 28 May 2015, <https://www.asme.org/engineering-topics/articles/business-communication/communicating-across-cultures>.

According to Winter and Hawthorne, Brazil is the first in number of missionaries sent from Latin America.⁹ The increasing number of Brazilian missionaries living in West Africa, especially in Niger, has caused a lasting impact, but how effective has been their cross-cultural communication? How difficult it is to become a skilled cross-cultural communicator? Since the goal of a missionary is to bring transformation through the Gospel, it is crucial to understand principles that will communicate a message that is coherent and contextually meaningful.

Some missionaries have a successful ministry in their country of origin but they terminate their cross-cultural ministry for lack of cross-cultural communication skills. This research is necessary due to the lack of literature focusing on Brazilian missionaries working in Niger and the need of specific guidelines based on biblical and missiological principles for cross-cultural communication of the Gospel.

1.2 Methodology

This case study will be conducted according to the following steps:

- a) An assessment Questionnaire of Cross-cultural Communication (QCC) will be designed and conducted with 45 Brazilian missionaries, 14 males and 31 females, who lived in Niger between the years 2003 and 2013. All participants will answer a structured questionnaire with 75 questions aiming to evaluate cross-cultural communication effectiveness.
- b) A review of cross-cultural communication literature will be done in the context of mission service.
- c) A review of cross-cultural communication events in the biblical texts will be researched.
- d) After collecting the questionnaires, all results will be evaluated in order to verify the ability of missionaries to understand and practice cognitive, affective, and evaluative communication effectively in a high context culture.
- e) Considering the information from literature review and the survey, recommendations for an effective cross-cultural communication will be proposed.

⁹ Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne, *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, (Pasadena: WCL, 1999), 71.

In order to create a common understanding of the keywords used in this paper, a short definition of terms will be given.

Communication: The continuous existence of communication in everyday life justifies a deeper look into its actual meaning. Storti (1999) explains, "Communication... is one of the most common of all human behaviors."¹⁰ What does the term "communication" mean? The authors Nancy Adler and Robert Gibson both describe communication as "the exchange of meaning."¹¹ The definition is simple, but on the contrary, the process of communication is extremely complex, multi-layered and dynamic. This is because communication is always dependent on the perception, interpretation and evaluation of a person's behaviour, which includes verbal versus non-verbal as well as consciously versus unconsciously sent messages.¹² In other words, the message sent by the message sender not always corresponds with the message received by the message receiver. There are many filters in the process of communication and the sender needs to ascertain if the receiver understood the meaning of the message transmitted.

Culture: Numerous authors have reflected on the meaning of the term "culture" and produced hundreds of definitions. Gibson sustains that culture is most commonly described by many as a "shared system of attitudes, beliefs, values and behavior."¹³ The author Martin Soley defends a similar definition affirming that culture is "a shared system of perceptions."¹⁴ Therefore, culture plays a highly significant role in communication. Paul Hiebert prefers to define culture as "the more or less integrated system of ideas, feelings, and values and their associated patterns of behaviour and products shared by a group of people who organize and regulate what they think, feel, and do,"¹⁵ The "ideas, feelings, and values" in this definition refer to the three dimensions of culture: cognitive, affective, and evaluative. Hiebert understands culture

¹⁰ Craig Storti, *Figuring Foreigners Out: A Practical Guide* (Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural, 1999), 87.

¹¹ Nancy Adler, *International Dimensions of Organizational Behavior* (Cincinnati: SouthWestern College, 1997), 68; Robert Gibson, *International Business Communication* (Berlin: Cornelsen, 2000), 18.

¹² Adler, *International Dimensions*, 68.

¹³ Gibson, *International Business Communication*, 16.

¹⁴ Martin Soley and Kaushik V. Pandya, "Culture as an Issue in Knowledge Sharing: A Means of Competitive Advantage," *The Electronic Journal of Knowledge Management* 1, no. 2 (November 2003): 206, accessed June 29, 2016, <http://www.ejkm.com/volume1/issue2/p1>.

¹⁵ Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1985), 30.

as manifested in behaviours and in products. Kraft defines culture as “a society’s complex, integrated coping mechanism, consisting of learned, patterned concepts and behaviour, plus their underlying perspectives or worldview and resulting artefacts or material culture.”¹⁶

Cross-cultural Communication: It is normally understood of as communication that occurs between members of different life backgrounds. Adler applies the terms “cross-cultural communication” or “intercultural communication” when the sender and the receiver of a message are from different cultures.”¹⁷ Cross-cultural communication is distinguished from intracultural communication, which occurs between people sharing a common culture, and intercultural communication, which refers to exchanges in interpersonal settings between individuals from different cultures.¹⁸

2. Cross-Cultural Communication in the Bible

Since the main instrument of work for a missionary is the Bible, it is imperative to understand the principles of cross-cultural communication exposed in the biblical account and in the odyssey of its characters.

God is a cross-cultural communicator and missionary. The progressive revelation of God according to the biblical narrative is a cross-cultural communication process. That is why it is important to reflect on the Divine process of communication: a) both theological terms representing this are *trinitas*¹⁹ (trinity) and *missio Dei*²⁰ (God’s mission); b) the triune God communicates within the Trinity in a love relationship; and c) this love overflows the Trinity and reaches the creatures. This is the reason why God sends Himself to His Creatures, *missio Dei*, which in Latin means, “to send.”

The mission of God is expressed when: a) the Father sends His Son (John 3:16); b) when the Father sends the Holy Spirit (John 14:26); and c) when the Father and the Son send the Holy Spirit (John 14:16; 15:26; 16:7).

¹⁶ Charles H. Kraft, *Anthropology for Christian Witness* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996), 38.

¹⁷ Adler, *International Dimensions*, 70.

¹⁸ Michael H. Prosser, “Cross-Cultural Communication Theory,” *Encyclopedia of Communication Theory*, accessed 12 June 2015, https://edge.sagepub.com/system/files/77593_6.1ref.pdf.

¹⁹ John A. McGuckin, “Trinitas,” *The Westminster Handbook to Patristic Theology*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 338.

²⁰ William A. Dyrness and Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, “Missio Dei,” *Global Dictionary of Theology* (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity, 2008), 403.

The mission of the people of God is expressed when the Triune God sends Israel (Gen 12:1-3; 17:1-2; Exod 19:5-6; Isa 42:6) and the Church to the world (Matt 28:16-20; Mark 16:15-18; Luke 24:47-49; John 20:21-22; Acts 1:8).

2.1 Cross-Cultural Communication in the Old Testament

In the Old Testament times, God communicates with Abraham and the Jewish people in an understandable way, adapted to the culture, which is close to animism²¹, but communicates new information, by changing the meaning of the forms and creating new symbols. A few examples are: a) the name of God which is changed from *Elohim* to *Yahweh*²²; b) the alliances (Gen 9:9-17; 12:1-3; 15:4-21; 17:1-27; Exod 19:5-6; 24:4-8; 2 Sam 7:12-17; Jer 31:31-34; b) non sacrifice of children (Gen 22); c) the ark inside the Holy of the Holies (Exod 25); d) the laws concerning sacrificial rituals (Lev 1-7); e) the code of holiness (Lev 11-15; 17-25); f) God use mediators: Moses and the prophets; g) the prophets communicate in images like a funeral lament (Amos 5:1-2), lamentations (Amos 5:18; 6.1), proverbs (Amos 3:3-6), puzzles (Amos 2:9; 3:12; 5:2, 7, 19, 24), symbolic names (Hos 1:3-9, symbolic acts (Hos 1:2-3; 3:1-2) ; Ezek 4; 12:1-20), and metaphors (Ezra 16).

These few examples clearly demonstrate that God intentionally communicates by means of the three levels of cross-cultural communication: a) cognitive level: understanding of words, concepts and its explicit meaning; b) affective level: understanding of feelings, aesthetics and relationships present in the process; and, c) evaluative Level: understanding of the judgmental dimension, which is unconscious.²³ These three levels of communication are indispensable in order to avoid the danger of giving a greater weight to the cultural context and not to the revelation of God, which produces syncretism as consequence. A good example appears in Isaiah 1:11-17, when God, who ordered the sacrificial rituals for worshipping him, says, "To what

²¹ According to Slick, animism is the belief that everything in the universe contains a living soul – the belief that every object is indwelt by a spirit (2012, para. 1).

²² *Abarim Publications*, "Elohim meaning/Elohim etymology," accessed 28 July 2015, <http://www.abarim-publications.com/Meaning/YHWH.html#.V3PXN7h9600>.

²³ Cheryl Doss, *Passport to Mission* (Berrien Springs: Institute of World Mission, 2002), 75-76.

purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to me?" Other examples are found in Amos 5:21-27 and Malachi 1:7-2.9.

2.2 Cross-Cultural Communication in the New Testament

In the New Testament times, God speaks through Jesus Christ, the Word of God (John 1:1-5). He became man (incarnation), specifically a Jew, a child (John 1:14; Phil 2:5-11). The incarnation is the best model for divine cross-cultural communication. Kraft argues that "in incarnation God identifies with the receptor. By so doing, he makes it possible for the receptor to complete what might be thought of as the communicational circle. That is, when the communicator gets close enough to the receptor to identify with him or her, the receptor is able to identify, in turn, with the communicator."²⁴ The apostles, especially Paul, followed this example when he said, "I have become all things to all" (1 Cor 9:19-22). Therefore, communication presented in terms of actions, attitudes and activities on real life, makes a greater impact than strictly verbal message.

2.3 Cross-Cultural Communication Literature Review

Cross-cultural communication is successful when the message is intentionally contextualized. Kraft sustains that "all human interpretation is done from the point of view of the interpreter who are never free of bias."²⁵ The contextualization of the Christian theology is an essential process in the effective communication of the Gospel."²⁶

In order to explain the most appropriated process of contextualization, Hiebert chose the term "critical contextualization," as described in the next paragraph, while Charles Kraft has preferred the term, "appropriate Christianity" which examines contextualization in three crucial dimensions: truth, allegiance and spiritual power.²⁷

²⁴ Charles H. Kraft, *Culture, Communication and Christianity* (Pasadena: Willian Carey Library, 2001), 212.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 348.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 344.

²⁷ Charles H. Kraft, *Appropriate Christianity*, (Pasadena: Willian Carey Library, 2005), 99-100.

The five steps for critical contextualization suggested by Hiebert are fundamental for an effective cross-cultural communication of the Gospel. They are: a) Exegesis of culture: it is uncritical, non-judgmental, sympathetic, and search for deeper meanings, trying to find “hooks” upon which to “hang” the Gospel or building bridges of entry; b) Exegesis and application of the Bible: it is a process of taking strengths and weaknesses into account, affirming that which is good, and allowing the Bible to judge that which is bad; c) Critical response and self-application: locals are always best able to critique their customs and apply the Bible meaning while the leader must allow them to have ownership of their decisions and live with it. Their responses should always be sought when people are calm. In this process, the missionary will retain elements that are positive or neutral, reject elements that carry deep and harmful meanings, and modify elements by giving them new Christian meanings; and d) Identifying functional substitutes by filling potential vacuums and finding positive, alternative options: substituting new rituals and symbols borrowed from another culture (i.e., Burial practices), adopting rites from Christian tradition (i.e., Baptism, Lord’s Supper), and creating new symbols and rituals (i.e., Christian puberty rites); e) transformational ministries: This is the final step of teaching redemptive discipline for a transforming journey.²⁸ Therefore, for the reasons mentioned by Hiebert and Kraft, critical contextualization plays a major role in cross-communication and it is relatively more important in some situations.

3. High-Context and Low-Context Culture

There are significant differences across cultures in the ways and the extent to which people communicate through context. One of the main distinctions between cultures is the notion of high and low context cultures, proposed by the American anthropologist Edward. T. Hall in his classic, *Beyond Culture* (1989). Hall systematises cultural differences in the use of language and context in communication. He identifies as low context (LC) any communication that occurs mostly through language and as high context (HC) communication that occurs in ways other than through language.²⁹

²⁸ Paul G. Hiebert, “Critical Contextualization,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* (July 1987): 109-111, accessed 23 May 2015, <http://hiebertglobalcenter.org/blog/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/108.-1987.-Critical-Contextualization.pdf>.

²⁹ Edward T. Hall, *Beyond Culture* (New York: Anchor Books, 1989), 105.

Communication in a high context culture is less verbally explicit and information is familiar and often not written. It has more internalized understandings for the message communicated and multiple crosscutting ties and intersections with others. Knowledge is situational, specially based on long-term relationships. It has strong boundaries: who is accepted as belonging versus who is considered an “outsider”. Decisions and activities focus around personal face-to-face relationships, often around a central person who has authority.³⁰ A few examples are small religious congregations, a party with friends, family gatherings, an exotic restaurants and neighbourhood restaurants with a regular clientele, undergraduate on-campus friendships, a soccer team, or regular pick-up games.

A LC communication is just the opposite. A good example is the mass communication, which is presented in the explicit code. HC communication features preprogramed information that is in the receiver and in the setting, with only minimal information in the transmitted message. LC transactions are the reverse. Most of the information must be in the transmitted message in order to complement what is missing in the context. Although no culture exists exclusively at one end of the scale, some are high while others are low.

Both Brazil and Niger is considered high context cultures.³¹ This means that people who grow up in these countries place a strong emphasis on how a message is said rather than on the words used alone. As a result, for many Brazilians and Nigeriens, the eloquence with which one presents one’s position becomes a part of the message.

Victor clarifies that “for the rhetorical effect alone, some individuals may exaggerate but this is done in such a way that others know it to be an exaggeration. People from more literal low context cultures such as the United States, however, may misunderstand such rhetorical flourishes as dishonesty.”³² It is only within the context of this personal and trustful relationship that most practical communication can take place.

Communication in low context culture is rule oriented as people are restricted by external rules. Knowledge is more often transferable and it is codified, public, external, and accessible. People have more interpersonal

³⁰ Edward T. Hall, *Beyond Culture*, 92-95; 101.

³¹ Deborah Barrett, *Leadership Communication, Business Communication*, (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2006), 197.

³² David A. Victor, “Brazil, Doing Business in,” “Encyclopedia of Business,” 2nd ed., para. 51, at Reference for Business, accessed June 10, 2016, <http://www.referenceforbusiness.com/encyclopedia/Assem-Braz/Brazil-DoingBusiness-in.html#ixzz3k4c7Fs7V>.

connections of shorter duration, and life runs in sequential mode, as there is a clear separation of time, of possessions, of space, of activities, and of relationships. It is task-centered, as decisions and activities focus around what needs to be done according to the agreed responsibilities of the individuals.³³ A few examples are large airports, a chain of supermarkets, a cafeteria, a convenience store, sports where rules are clearly expressed or a hotel. Although these terms are often useful to describe some aspects of a culture, it is inappropriate to say that a particular culture is “high” or “low” context because there are in all societies both modes. “High” and “low” are therefore less relevant as a description of a whole people. These terms are useful to describe and understand specific contexts and situations.

3.1 Distinctive Characteristics Between High-Context and Low Context

Hall observes that “meaning and context are inextricably bound up with each other”³⁴ and suggested that to understand communication one should look at meaning and context together with the code (i.e., the words themselves). Context refers to the situation, background, or environment connected to an event, a situation, or an individual. Communication in a HC situation is not only the non-verbal and para-verbal communication that comes into play, HC communication takes into consideration physical aspects as well as the time and situation in which it takes place. The closer the relationship, the more HC the communication tends to be as shown in Figure 12.1.

When you enter a high context situation, it does not immediately become a low context culture just because you came in the door. It is still a high context culture and you are just ignorant.”³⁵

³³ Hall, *Beyond Culture*, 92-95; 101.

³⁴ Hall, *Beyond Culture*, 36.

³⁵ Jennifer E. Beer, “Communicating Across Cultures: High and Low Context,” accessed 19 June 2015, <http://www.culture-at-work.com/highlow.html>.

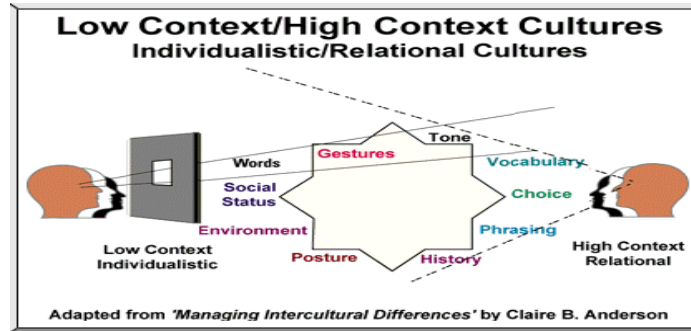


Figure 1. Low Context/High Context Cultures. Retrieved 10 June.2015, from <http://my.ilstu.edu/~jrbaldw/372/Values.htm>

3.2 High Context vs. Low Context

Therefore, people from different cultural contexts can perceive each other in many different ways according to Figure 2, which shows how people from high and low contextual cultures see themselves and their opposites.

High Context Communication polite respectful integrates by similarities/harmony not direct	Low Context Communication open true integrates by authenticity direct
High Context claims Low Context impolite "cannot read between the lines" naïve no self discipline too fast	Low Context claims High Context hiding information not trustable arrogant too formal too slow

Figure 2. Comparison Retrieved 10 June 2015 from <https://laofutze.wordpress.com/2009/07/28/e-t-hall-high-low-context/>

4. Results and Implications

The data analysis of the QCC indicates that the missionaries surveyed were open to expose and assess their missionary experience. The result is based on the answers of 32 (71,11%) of the 45 missionaries requested to

participate and demonstrates that their cross-cultural communication in a HC culture like Niger has been effective, meaningful, and has caused a positive impact. The findings reveal that Brazilian missionaries who worked in Niger interrelated well with the people probably because of their high context cultural origin and the ability to internalize new concepts, forms and meanings and, consequently, they were able to communicate meaningfully in high context cultural settings as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Cross-cultural Communication Analysis of the Missionaries as a Group

Areas of Strength	%
Have a positive cultural self-image	70.4
Are able to express themselves in contextualized forms	66.9
Are cross-cultural active listeners	60.1
Are able to open up and be corresponded	60.3
Are able to comfortably deal with cultural differences	58.5

The QCC also demonstrates different levels of cross-cultural communication skills for individuals as shown on Table 2. This proves that although they are originally from the same cultural background, their cultural perception and communication abilities varies, but most have revealed a satisfactory level. As a group, they have had 59 points in the survey, classifying them in a high level of communication. This reveals that the strength of some individuals overcomes the weaknesses of others of the same group. This explains why cross-cultural communication is more successful when the message intended to transmit is expressed through a group project.

Table 2. Cross-cultural Communication Analysis of the Missionaries as Individuals

Level	Points	%
Superior	Above 55	25,0
Satisfactory	Between 41 – 54	62,6
Tolerable	Under 40	12,5

Another session of the QCC is the self-assessment, which is the process of looking at oneself in order to assess aspects of cross-cultural communication that are important to one's identity as shown on Table 3. The cognitive level assesses the understanding of words, concepts and its explicit meanings. The affective level assesses the understanding of feelings and relationships present in the process. The evaluative level assesses the understanding of judgmental dimension, which is mostly unconscious. Missionary motivational level assesses the reasons encouraging a missionary to focus on the purpose of the mission.

Table 3. Cross-cultural Communication Self-Assessment

Level	Cognitive (%)	Affective (%)	Evaluative (%)	Missionary (%)
Excellent	17,62	16,77	13,78	38,15
Above average	30,40	42,85	39,73	27,70
Average	29,40	28,85	35,61	24,83
Below average	9,41	8,68	4,00	4,80
Very poor	13,17	2,85	6,88	4,52

The findings from the literature review reveals that when people communicate, they move along a continuum between high context and low context. Depending on the kind of relationship, the situation, and the purpose of communication, they may be more or less explicit and direct. This implies the need to search for understanding beyond the mechanics of the words and requires patience and time to observe and learn. Teaching new concepts and ideas in cross-cultural context demands strategic methods like the need to contextualize the message critically in order to avoid syncretism and double allegiance.

The research of cross-cultural communication in Bible history points that throughout the chronological narratives of the Old and New Testaments, God communicates with humanity in different ways including high and low context communication tools, like known written and cultural forms, values, aesthetics traditions, and rituals. This indicates that cross-cultural communicators need to employ a variety of styles to communicate successfully.

5. Recommendations

There is an Eastern fable about a monkey who was caught by a typhoon and found protection on a tree by a stream. After the rain, the waters rose rapidly isolating him from his group. Looking down, he saw a fish that swam unsuccessfully against the current of the water. Because he had never seen that animal, he thought it was drowning and decided to save it. He jumped from branch to branch, running a great risk, as the branches were wet, and hanging by his tail on the end of a fragile branch, with great effort he managed to reach the fish with his hand and gently led him to the ground. The fish was jumping with joy between his fingers, and shortly after, when it calmed down the monkey realized it was dead and said to himself, "what a pity I did not come sooner." There are at least three lessons that we learn with the well-intentioned monkey who helped a fish to come out from a suffering situation, taking him from his habitat, but sentencing him to death.

Cross-cultural communicators need to be focused. The target is the person and the message is communicated intentionally, not mechanically and according to the circumstances. It is easier for a missionary from a high context culture to focus in the person as a whole (mind, emotions, sounds, gestures, expressions, etc.); while a missionary from a low context culture will find it harder. The role of a missionary in a world characterized by crises, and in constant and rapid transformation, is to stay focused on the person and his existential needs by offering coherent biblical answers to the struggles of life. White reminds us: "Christ's method alone will give true success in reaching the people. He approached people as one who desired their good, he showed sympathy, he ministered to their needs, he gained their confidence, he said, 'Follow Me.'"³⁶ The method has not changed but the strategies can be varied so that the focus remains in the person.

Cross-cultural communicators need to be liquid. Liquid leadership is one that penetrates the environment and fits the space, but do not lose any of its properties. The waters of melted snow come down from the mountains and deviate from rocks and obstacles reaching their final destination after many days or months while still being water. The apostle Paul said the following about his fluid leadership:

To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's

³⁶ Ellen G. White, *Ministry of Healing* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 1992), 143.

law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some (1 Cor 9: 20-22).

A journalist in a train station hoping to get an interview for his newspaper was once chasing the global leader Mahatma Gandhi. Despite his persistence, Gandhi politely declined to answer his question. Finally, as the train was pulling out of the station, the reporter shouted: "please, give me a message to the people!" Without hesitation, Gandhi leaned out of the window and shouted back: "my life is my message".³⁷ Missionaries need to live the message they want to communicate so that their mission is something they can exhibit every day, whether in low or in high context culture environment.

Cross-cultural communicators need to contextualize their message. A missionary needs mental strength and will to love, learn, and serve in any culture, even in the midst of pain and discomfort. From his observations and experiences, the missionary offers an interesting model for a transforming achievement, both engaged to the biblical teachings and contextualized.

According to Hiebert,

in contextualization, the heart of the gospel must be kept by encoding it in forms that are understood by the people, without making the gospel captive to the contexts. This is an ongoing process of embodying the gospel in an ever-changing world. Here cultures are viewed as both good and evil, not simply as neutral vehicles for understanding the world." We are all relativized by the gospel.³⁸

5.1 Awareness of Low and High Culture

Cross-cultural communicators need to be attentive to the characteristics of high-context and low-context cultures and especially know the differences between the two. It can help to lessen and even prevent conflicts, and make the communication smoother and easier.

LeBaron recommends that low-context culture communicators interacting with high-context culture communicators should observe that:

³⁷ Damian Hughs, *Liquid Leadership: Inspirational lessons from the world's great leaders*, (Baskerville: Thomson Digital, 2009), 23.

³⁸ Paul G. Hiebert, *The Gospel in Human Contexts: Anthropological Explorations for Contemporary Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academics, 2009), 29.

- (1) Nonverbal messages and gestures may be as important as what is said;
- (2) Status and identity may be communicated nonverbally and require appropriate acknowledgement;
- (3) Face-saving and tact may be important, and need to be balanced with the desire to communicate fully and frankly;
- (4) Building a good relationship can contribute to effectiveness over time; and
- (5) Indirect routes and creative thinking are important alternatives to problem-solving when blocks are encountered.

LeBaron also recommends that high-context communicators interacting with low-context communicators should be conscious that:

- (1) Information can be passed directly and clearly rather than as a representation of layers of meaning;
- (2) Roles and functions may be separated from status and identity;
- (3) Efficiency and effectiveness may be reached by a sustained focus on tasks;
- (4) Direct questions and observations are not necessarily meant to offend, but to clarify and advance shared goals; and
- (5) Indirect cues may not be enough to get the other's attention.³⁹

5.2 The Chronological Teaching Method

The research on biblical texts and literature sources about cross-cultural communication on high and low context cultures indicates that the chronological method of communication of the Gospel proves to be the most effective system to transmit a meaningful and contextualized message. It seeks to present the Bible story as accurately as it is in the Scriptures with a minimum of explanation. Theological truths are better understood in oral cultures like Niger within the story itself, rather than abstract principles taught in literate teaching styles.

This is the most appropriate method of cross-cultural communication of the Gospel as it takes into consideration firstly the fact that the conversion is a process and, secondly, that the cross of Christ is a shame

³⁹ Michelle LeBaron, "Communication Tools for Understanding Cultural Differences," accessed 14 June 2015, <http://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/communication-tools>.

and foolishness to people who lives in an honour-shame⁴⁰ cultural context like Niger. It respects the principle of cross-cultural communication to introduce discontinuities (breaks) gradually in order to avoid breaking contact and misunderstandings around the person of Christ. The teaching of the following five concepts are recommended:

5.2.1 The Concept of God

- God is the Creator (Gen 1:1). He is different from all other creatures (as spirits, ancestors); He is holy (Lev 19:2).
- The creation was good (Gen 1:31): God is good.
- God wants to be an exclusive partner and omnipresent (Gen 17:1; 28:16).

5.2.2 The Concept of Man

- Man is created in the image of God (Gen 1:26) with a conscience, free will and responsibility (as opposed to Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism).
- Human beings are created man and woman (Gen 1:27). The woman is a helper (Gen 2:18) and has equal value as opposed to animism, Islam, Hinduism.
- Man receives from God the honour and power: He is God's representative, must manage the creation (Gen 2:15) and name the animals (Gen 2:19).

5.2.3 The Concept of Evil and the Great Controversy

- The evil enters into the world through Satan and does not come from God by fate (Gen 3:1)
- In the beginning Lucifer was an angel of God who fell in rebellion later. He was called Satan and was separated from God because of his pride (Isa 14:12-17; Ezek 28:11-19; Rev 12:9; 20:10).
- A third of the angels followed Satan and became his demons (Rev 12:4).

⁴⁰ Shame-honor cultures: describe collectivistic cultures, where people are shamed for not fulfilling group expectations and seek to restore their honor before the community.

5.2.4 The Concept of Sin

- Man disobeyed God (Gen 2:17). Sin enters in the world and the solution is repentance, which means turning in the right direction. When the violation is discovered his sin brings consequences like shame and animism.
- God discovers their sin (Gen 3:8). Shame entered the world (Gen 3:7, 10). Man is expelled from paradise (Gen 3:23). Man suffers in his work (Gen 3:17-19), he dominates the woman who suffers to give birth (Gen 3:16).
- The consequence of sin is that man loses harmony, honour and power (Rom 3:23).

5.2.5 The Concept of Salvation

- The sacrifice of Jesus Christ restores harmony, honour and power through forgiveness (Rom 3:23)
- A skin to cover the shame (Gen 3:21; Heb 9:22).
- The sacrifice of Abel was accepted, Cain's good works are rejected (Gen 4).
- The son of Abraham is replaced by a ram. God will provide a lamb (Gen 22).
- The Passover lamb must be perfect (Exod 12).
- The sacrifices for sinning are necessary for receiving forgiveness (Lev 4-5).
- The sacrifice of the Great Day of Atonement is for the high priest and for the people (Lev 16).
- The expiatory sacrifice bore the sin of many (Isa 52:13; 53:12; Mark 10:45). Jesus is the son of Abraham (Matt 1:1), the Lamb of God (John 1:29), and the suffering Servant of the Lord (Matt 26-27).
- The woman's son will crush the serpent's head (Gen 3:15).
- The ark saves the faithful remnant of humanity: the family of Noah (Gen 6-9).
- Joseph saves Jacob's family through suffering (Gen 37-48).
- Moses saves the Jewish people through suffering (Exodus and Deuteronomy).
- The Lord will raise up a prophet like Moses from the people Israel (Deut 18:15).
- A king like David (a son of David) will save the people (2 Sam 7:16).

- A virgin shall bring forth a son named Emmanuel (Isa 7:14).
- A sprout will grow from the stem of Jesse (David's son) and reign (Isa 11:1).
- The suffering servant of the Lord will save the people (Isa 42:1-9).
- The Son of Man shall reign (Dan 7:13). Jesus Christ is the son of David (Matt 1:1), the son of the woman (Luke 1:26-38), the Son of Man (Matt 9:6; 12:40; 16:27), and the servant of the Lord (Luke 4:18-19; John 13) who saves the world.

6. Conclusion

The primary aim of this paper was to demonstrate how a person's cultural background affects communication, specifically in the case of missionaries from Brazil working in Niger. God's word has a transforming impact on people's lives when we present it in ways that they can understand.

It was found that the process of communication involves the perception, interpretation, and evaluation of a person's behaviour. All three levels of communication are dependent on a person's cultural background, which determines the meanings attached to a specific behaviour.

This finding is important for a number of reasons. First, context plays a real important role in the cross-cultural communication and a clear understanding of the differences within contexts is quite necessary. Second, in low context cultures people tend to rely heavily on the spoken word while in high context cultures people focus strongly on context. Although this paper mainly deals with the case of communication between Brazilians and Nigeriens, Hall's distinction of high and low context culture, can be identified through almost all the countries with typical cultures. Third, it was shown that perception is based on cognitive, affective, and evaluative patterns which can be learned until it becomes consistent, accurate, and most importantly, culturally adjusted. Fourth, this leads to the conclusion that two people from different cultures will not only communicate in different ways but also perceive a situation differently.

This study has produced a number of suggestions for improving cross-cultural communication of missionaries. The critical contextualization of the message is the most appropriate method to enable a person to understand the intended meaning that a missionary wants to communicate.

Furthermore, the chronological teaching of the Bible is the best method used for evangelism, discipleship and church planting in high context cultures like Niger since it provides the necessary background for pre-

literate people with no previous exposure to Christianity who need to understand the concepts that lead up to the Gospels and the coming of Christ.

It is expected that the results of this study will begin to break down the barriers that are preventing a contextualized and meaningful understanding of the Gospel in Niger.