

LEARNING NEW TESTAMENT GREEK: EVALUATING CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS FOR CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS STUDIES IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Behind every research, is a mind and result arrived at for practical application. A research on biblical languages and the articulation of a position paper on understanding the impediments encountered in the teaching and learning of New Testament Greek, with prospects toward solution are paramount among investigations meant to foster intellectual, spiritual and moral exercise. The study is based on the primary hypotheses that: (i) Dearth of information, human and material resources, learning facilities, poor planning of study curriculum, limited study periods encapsulated in short semesters, and absence of motivation have given rise to low interest and growing difficulty in studying biblical Greek language in Nigerian Universities, Colleges of Education and Seminaries; (ii) A redesign of the curriculum and the establishment of well-equipped Biblical Language Centre would enhance scientific and spiritual knowledge, scriptural interpretation and promote salvation theorem; (iii) a good knowledge of the English grammar and syntactic skills are adequate to develop sufficient level of translation from Greek to English and vice-versa. The essence of this study is to examine the relationship between biblical students' level of understanding and interest in Biblical Greek as resource for intellectual and spiritual exercises. The research therefore investigates the hitches relating to the study of the koine Greek and the production of a document that would aid its study. The significance of the exercise is to benefit categories of stakeholders to master the English and Greek language so as to avoid ambiguity, misinterpreting spiritual messages and tackle the high propensity for untrained minds prone to poor hermeneutical method(s) that would metamorphose into potential social chaos, conflicting ideologies, misguided doctrines and unhealthy competitions among preachers and recipients of God's sacred word.

KEYWORDS: Evaluating, Greek, Challenges, Prospects, Nigeria

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

In a world of uncertainty and imperfection, men focus on the virtuous and desirable and what will not contradict their life aspirations and integrity, therefore, the

aim of achieving social solidarity, understanding and peaceful co-existence amongst people has led to the push for a better understanding of the human languages. Language plays a performativity role in every society therefore the wish of speakers, writers and readers alike is the common interest to be heard, well understood, better interpreted, adequately represented and better informed about issues of life. Hence, if we are to succeed in judging people correctly, we must first read their minds, since people communicate their minds best only in a well-thought-out language, especially their original language. Accordingly, AncaSirbu (405), states that “language is essentially a means of communication among the members of a society” and of various social groups. Thus, in the expression of culture, language as a fundamental aspect is the tool that conveys traditions and values related to group identity. Language as a verbal expression of culture is used to convey cultural ties, providing mankind with many of the categories used for the expression of human thoughts and feelings, because the thinking of men is influenced by the language they use. The moral values in any nation shape the way people think and act. These are expressed and conveyed by language which portends great lessons for intercultural communication in interactions between peoples from countries, cultures and diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds.

It is not unworthy to conclude that the yearning for a research work on the study of languages is worthwhile venture among other human wants and aspirations. The fear of being misrepresented in the process of articulating and transmitting our opinions and positions on concerns of life and matters relating to human activities in the fields of Natural, Medical and Environmental Sciences; Economics and Commerce; Philosophy, Religion, Theology and Spirituality; Anthropology, History, Law and Jurisprudence; Politics and Governance, and Technology have given rise to strong interest in learning the diverse human languages and articulations. A good knowledge of many languages is not just advantageous but would far remove the errors of judgment and misunderstanding of the human mind if the right choice of words, correct meaning, interpretation and articulation of the language of communication are applied by the speakers and listeners alike.

The implication of the present line of research is to provide information that would help to improve the methods and quality of teaching and learning New Testament Greek; that sacred and ancient human language used by God to reach out to people in His plan of salvation. This can only be achieved with a design in mind of the essential tools for learning and application of the language. Therefore a curriculum would be designed to help Universities, Colleges of Education, and Sacred Institutions of learning to train their teachers and students to develop interest, flair and ready skills for interpreting, pontificating and transmitting the sacred language. It is not uncommon that God chose the Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek languages to communicate His inspired Word. Thus, understanding these languages in their original form re-enforces detailed hermeneutical approach and exegetical competence (Starner 1-3). The obvious conviction here,

according to Okode (91) and Hafemann (86-89), is that, “there are treasures that a minister of the Word of God can extract only if he is competent in Hebrew and Greek”, because knowing biblical languages is crucial for exegetical accuracy and theological profundity. Though, “it is precisely because there are so many excellent commentaries available today that the use of the biblical languages in preaching becomes more important, not less”. For this apparent reason, “no translation or commentary can eliminate the need to study the Bible in the original languages”. The Greek language is not just for achieving a meditative reasoning but also for calculative and technical discernment, hence its relevance in various fields of human endeavours.

The aim of the research focuses on how to facilitate an enabling environment for students, teachers, and interpreters of the Christian scriptures that conducts research based on the Greek text and acknowledges the accuracy of biblical interpretation, translation and application without much stress. The general objective is to examine the value and relevance of studying human languages, especially those related to religious, spiritual and moral instructions; and to develop fresh ideas as modest contribution to the bank of knowledge in the area of biblical language studies. The specific objectives include, to: (i) unearth relevant information on the gray areas responsible for the hindrance toward effective teaching and learning of the Greek language, not just as an academic exercise but also as a language of spiritual and moral instruction; (ii) identify the challenges to effective teaching and learning, and articulate a position on innovative methods of studying the biblical Greek language; (iii) establish a well-equipped and functional Centre of Excellence for Study of Biblical languages in the University of Jos, Nigeria; and (iv) design a curriculum suitable for the study of the Greek language and produce relevant texts meant to offer the learner relatively simple language rules in English and Greek languages to improve learning. This study is justified on the principle that two of the researchers are scholars in the area of biblical studies (New Testament), while the third is a specialist from the department of English. The trio can perfectly combine to produce a text that is near free of simple errors, as end products of the research.

Shades of opinions have been considered under sub-topics of various discourses. For example, Lois Fuller (190-1) clearly affirms that understanding and interpretation of any language depends on a fairly good knowledge of its originality and the original meaning of what it seeks to express and convey. Since language is expressed in culture, no meaning accorded to a word in its original form can be made clearer and more meaningful in another language than when expressed in its original content and context. While referring to the understanding of the Greek language, for instance, made the point that other people have attempted translating the New Testament into the language that is well known to them. However, “there can never be a perfect translation exactly as they are said in the first language”. Accordingly, it is proper for the persons involved to know the original Greek in which the New Testament was first written to enable them monitor the accuracies of translations, to judge how right interpretations are and challenge false

teachers who are likely to confuse Christians by misrepresenting what the original New Testament Greek actually says and means. More so, the student, teacher, or preacher of the New Testament who conducts his research based on the Greek text acknowledges the fact that his work is more accurate with respect to interpretation and exegesis.

Many other language scholars agree with this truth about the essence of studying the biblical Greek. Scholars who advanced the cause of biblical languages as means of cultural, social and national identity include, Nicole Nau's *Languange and Culture*; Anca Sirbu; Louis-Jacques Dorais in an article titled, *language, Culture and Identity: Some Inuit Examples*; Steven Lee's *The Significance of Language and Cultural Education on Secondary Achievement: A Survey of Chinese-American and Korean-American Students*; Starner (cf. Isaiah 55:3ff); Wendy Helleman and Dauda Gava; Enoch Okode; Nicholas Frankovich's *Why Study Biblical Languages?*; and Martin Lurthier's *The Importance of Biblical Language*", excerpts from: *To the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany that They establish and Maintain Christian Schools [1524]*, established by Rod Decker (cf. Richardson 77); John Parratt (142-144).

As summary of our literature, researches have proven that language is the salt and spice of life which preserves human cultural heritages, values, interactions, philosophies, and practices. Languages are therefore essential means of communication among members of societies, groups and nations, and fulcrum of social, economic, political, industrial, psychical, theological and spiritual activism. The knowledge of these languages is existential and essential for the development of an adequate hermeneutical and exegetical construction and instruction for right behaviour and harmonious coexistence. Based on the shade of opinions, the present researchers believe that the significance of an in-depth study and knowledge of the Biblical Greek by Christians is key roadmap to Bible interpretation. However, a gap lies in the challenge of organizational ability, time allocation, and ready availability of human and financial resources to perfect the teaching and learning of the subject in Nigeria where a workably functional learning process remains an illusion. The question to be answered is what difference does it really make if biblical scholars are not well trained in the language of sacred Scriptures that they preach to be more responsive to their needs and of those who receive the priceless message of salvation?

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The methodology adopted to achieve the aim and objectives of this research include: The research design, first considers the exegetical and hermeneutical approach appropriate to the study of biblical language data and the interdisciplinary method to analyze the different paradigms of language study in Nigeria. This means that, though it is foremost a theoretical investigation of relevant materials from library collections (cf. Janvier 4), it explores and exploit information using the secondary and primary sources. The study population comprises students, scholars and teachers of New Testament

studies. This includes opinions of religious leaders and ministers from spiritual and secular institutions. The study area covers five Universities, three colleges of Education and five seminaries in the different geopolitical zones in Nigeria: University of Port-Harcourt (South South), Benue State University (BSU – East Central), University of Lagos (South West), University of Jos (North Central), Gombe State University (North East) Nigeria. The Colleges of Education are Federal College of Education Pankshin, Kaduna State College of Education Gidan Waya, and College of Education Akwanga. The Seminaries include among others, ECWA Theological Seminary Jos, Saint Augustine's Major Seminary, Jos, Theological College of Northern Nigeria Bukuru, Kulp Bible College Kwarhi, Mubi, and ECWA Theological Seminary Kagoro. Consequently, a non-probability sampling technique known as the purposive sampling is used to gather information.

The instruments used for collecting the raw data include questionnaires, interview and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) by means of which tape recorders were employed. The qualitative method adopted the key informant interview technique, while the quantitative method of data collection used structured questionnaires with a Likert Scale type wherein the respondents specify their level of Agreement or Disagreement to the statement. This method is when a respondent is asked to indicate his or her strength of feeling about particular issue on a 1-5 rating scale as practicable statistical measurement of the people's attitude and/or opinion. In this research, the five-point scale with the following responses was used – (i) STRONGLY AGREE (ii) AGREE (iii) STRONGLY DISAGREE (iv) DISAGREE (v) UNCERTAIN.

The data collected from the interviews and focus group discussions are analyzed and reported in a historical and descriptive narrative form, while data from the questionnaire is reduced to manageable proportion in summary form to bring out the main features and interpretation based on the hypotheses of the research. Here, a coding frame was developed and entered into Epi-data and subsequently exported to SPSS for the analysis. Consequently, frequencies and cross tabulations were used involving the tabulation of the lowest to the highest values of the study variables for each respondent type. The research data was managed in such a way that materials and results were distributed to stakeholders based on consensus and consented permission wherein the extraction of information and research materials followed strictly the conventional processes whereby no one involved or any physical material in the course of investigation was abused or obtained without due permission and adequate acknowledgement of the study population.

STATE-OF-THE-ART IN THE STUDY

The state of the art in the study of languages has revealed that studying the languages of the Bible makes the Christian scripture comes alive and transforms the interpreter and enhances the exegetical values of the learner. The New Testament Greek

is taught in the secular and spiritual Nigerian Universities, specifically under the core Religious and Christian Religious Studies programmes. The Greek language is also taught in the Colleges of Education and religious institutions like the degree awarding Seminaries. In all these, many of these institutions engage students in the study of the Greek language for only one session and in some cases two sessions with emphasis on the introductory part – Introduction to Greek I and II; Greek Grammar and Syntax; and Greek Exegesis for higher degrees. Thus the course is studied at the 100 and 200 levels of the study programme only for most universities. In the University of Jos, Gombe State University, Benue State University Makurdi, National Open University of Nigeria, University of Lagos Akoka-Lagos, Mountain Top University Ogun State and Ekiti State University Ado Ekiti, for example, offering the Greek language as a course is optional for students in the Religious Studies programme, while for those in the core Christian Religious Studies, it is made compulsory (cf. NUC Self-Study Forms 48-53). Due to limited time and engagement in the study of the Greek language in many of the States, Federal and private or Christian owned universities, students hardly achieve proficiency in the subject. Indeed, many often fail the language courses and naturally lose interests in the study and in some cases drop the courses for other options.

However, for the Christian Religious Studies in spiritual institutions like ECWA Theological Seminary Igbaja, St. Augustine's Major Seminary Jos, Jos ECWA Theological Seminary, School of Biblical Studies Jos and Theological College of Northern Nigeria Bukuru, for instance, studies in the New Testament Greek and Old Testament Hebrew are more intense. In spite of this, the institutions offer the courses for only two academic sessions, at most, and sometimes made it optional for higher levels and degrees, especially for the study of Advanced Greek and Exegesis. Those in the Colleges of Education have limited levels of study especially for those on the CRS/Education programmes. Researches have shown also that more studies in the Biblical languages are undertaken in some universities that offer courses in Classics. Under this programme the subject area emphasizes the study of Greek language courses like Introduction to Greek I and II; New Testament Greek; Greek Language I and II; Greek Drama; Greek language and Literature; Greek Syntax, prosody and stylistics; and detailed study of prescribed texts (<https://nuc.edu.ng>). In spite of all these, none of these secular or religious institutions in Nigeria offer a Diploma or Degree awarding courses in Biblical Studies – New Testament Greek, Hebrew/Aramaic, Latin or Coptic.

Looking at the state-of-the-art in the study of Biblical languages, we arrive at the conclusion that unlike many Degree, Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) and National Diploma awarding courses like French, Arabic, English, Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa in Nigerian Universities, Colleges of Education and Seminaries, the Biblical languages – Greek and Hebrew – receive less attention. These other degree or diploma awarding language courses offer full-fledged courses on the language phonology, lexical and morphological features, syntax, pragmatics and stylistics, theories and methodologies,

usage and technical application in professional fields, theories of translation, multilingualism and psycholinguistics, and research writing. All these are not found in the limited periods and encapsulated semesters accorded to the study of the biblical languages in our universities, colleges of education and seminaries making it most difficult for students to acquire proficiency and technical skills in the languages for efficient teaching and learning. This problem propels us to carry out this investigation.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSES

Data Presentation: Below are tabulated number of respondents and their responses to the study questionnaire, delineated in two sections.

TABLE I: Gender of Respondents:

This table represents the grading of the number of respondents based on gender to determine the male-female attitude towards the study of the biblical Greek language.

GENDER	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
MALE	144	61%
FEMALE	92	39%
TOTAL	236	100%

TABLE II: Occupation of the Respondents:

OCCUPATION	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Teachers/Lecturers	48	20.34%
Pastors/Priests	36	15.25%
Students	152	64.41%
Total	236	100%

TABLE III: Tabulation of the Respondents by Qualification:

QUALIFICATION	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
SSCE/WAEC	106	45%
NCE/OND	50	21%
BA/Bsc/B,Ed.	31	13%
MA/Msc/M.Ed.	42	18%
Ph. D	7	3%
Total	236	100%

TABLE IV: Questionnaire Administered and the Number Returned

QUESTIONNAIRES	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Number Administered	250	100%
Number Returned	236	94%
Number Not Returned	14	6%

TABLE V: Presentation and Analysis of Responses on the Quantitative Investigation

QUESTIONS (Q)	SA	A	SD	D	U	TOTAL
Q1	76	104	13	32	11	236
%	32.2	44.1	5.5	13.6	4.7	100.0
Q2	106	82	19	19	10	236
%	44.9	34.7	8.1	8.1	4.2	100.0
Q3	117	84	11	21	3	236
%	49.6	35.6	4.7	8.9	1.3	100.0
Q4	147	52	16	9	12	236
%	62.3	22.0	6.8	3.8	5.1	100.0
Q5	153	68	4	7	4	236
%	64.8	28.8	1.7	3.0	1.7	100.0
Q6	132	65	11	14	14	236
%	55.9	27.5	4.7	5.9	5.9	100.0
Q7	102	76	18	26	14	236
%	43.2	32.2	7.6	11.0	5.9	100.0
Q8	110	88	11	13	14	236
%	46.6	37.3	4.7	5.5	5.9	100.0
Q9	148	70	6	6	6	236
%	62.7	29.7	2.5	2.5	2.5	100.0
Q10	170	48	7	8	3	236
%	72.0	20.3	3.0	3.4	1.3	100.0

KEY: *SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; SD = Strongly Disagree; D = Disagree; and U = Uncertain.²

Data Analyses and Reporting

The analysis of the above investigation based on the responses of the respondents reveal that the questions used for the qualitative investigation and the opinions expressed

²Q1 to Q10 represents Questions 1 to 10 and though not questions in the real sense they signify the statements or assertions that require acceptance or rejection. The responses in agreement or in negation form the core of the result of the investigation into the problem associated with the Greek study project.

in the questionnaire are organized into two separate subdivisions. The first section contains the following categories: Gender, Occupation, and Qualification of respondents based on the number of questionnaires administered and those subsequently retrieved. The data on this section is presented as Tables I – IV, respectively. The second segment, which covers and conveys the ten (10) questions are the research assertions and/or statements that require the respondents' affirmation or disagreement based on a 1 – 5 option presented to them, namely, **Strongly Agree; Agree; Strongly Disagree; Disagree;** and **Uncertain**. The data on this section, which is the core of the research investigation, is presented as Table V above.

The analysis and report of the investigation would follow the following format for clarity of purpose:

Gender: The gender component of the investigation has shown that out of the 236 questionnaires returned 144 are male respondents representing 61%, while 92 are female gender-based representing 39%. The category is suggestive of the fact that more work has to be done on the area and opinion of the feminine folk in terms of their levels of participation in policy decision making as it relates to their interest in the study of the human languages, particularly the biblical languages. Assessing their responses in respect to questions 1,2 and 4, they seem to agree more forcefully than their male counterparts. The responses of the female respondents indicate that 13 out of 92 who filled and returned the questionnaire disagree with the opinions shared in these statements representing about 14.12%, while 79 agree strongly with the ideas on the same issues, representing approximately 85.88%. This is perhaps due to the cumbersome nature of the study which the language demands of its learners and the time to be devoted to it. We presume that women are much faster and talented in learning languages than men but that depends on the time, interest, opportunity and the level of encouragement by their male counterparts who can withstand strenuous competitions over time and under more stressful conditions.

Occupation: The responses to the questionnaire based on the occupation of our target audience reveals the following result: (a) of the 236 respondents, 48 are teachers/lecturers in the various institutions of learning making up 20.34%; (b) 36 are numbered amongst pastors and priests expressing 15.25%; while (c) the student population formed the greater part of the remaining total of 152 signifying 64.41%. This result shows that students were more in number clinching the hypothesis that the students find the study of the Greek language more demanding and therefore a difficult task to attain within the Nigerian context. This opinion is based on the responses gathered from the overwhelming level of agreement(s) with the statements as shown on the result table of the questionnaire.

Qualification: Considering the result of the findings based on the qualification of respondents, the following apparent indices are evident: (a) out of the 236 responses to the questionnaire, 106 had attended the SSCE/WAEC level, representing 45%; (b) the number with NCE or OND amounted to 50 translating into 21%; those with BA/BSc/B.Ed. or were on the program numbered 31, signifying 13%; while those with

MA/MSc/M.Ed. degrees or pursuing same totalled 42 representing 18%; and the number that had attended the Ph.D. level totalled 7 representing 3%. The results from the responses reveal that the higher the degree of the respondent(s), the more stressful and difficult the learning process and access to instructional facilities and resource persons.

Questionnaire: The statistics obtained from the questionnaire is presented and analyzed within the context of the number administered, filled and returned by the respondents. A computation of the total number administered against the total number returned is done to see whether the data can validate or nullify the existing hypotheses. The researchers administered 250 questionnaires apart from the open-ended questions used in the interviews and focus group discussions. Out of 250 questionnaires sent out, 236 were received back representing 94%, while 14 were not returned representing 6% of the aggregate. The result of this computation indicates that we can draw conclusions from the data presented in relation to the positions of respondents.

Presentation, Analysis and Interpretation of Responses:

The presentation and analysis of the questionnaires is based on the levels of agreement or disagreement with the statements expressed on each question, which determines whether the propositions are significant or not. Here the T-Test is used to analyze the strength of each question or statement to determine if the null hypothesis is accepted or rejected. In presenting the data gathered from the field investigation, the strength of responses, under the options – Strongly Agree, Agree, Strongly Disagree, Disagree and Uncertain – are tested and measured on the basis of each statement to determine the acceptability or rejection of the intention and goal of the research. Thus, the presentation and analysis is set in this order:

Question 1: I encounter difficulty in teaching/learning the Greek language:

The responses in this statement of investigation provide the significant pathway for determining the validity of main object of this research, namely that, there are impediments and hiccups associated with the effective teaching and learning of the Greek language. The result of the investigation in question 1 indicates the following: The respondents who accepted the **Strongly Agree** option numbered 76 out of 236 representing 32.2%, while the **Agree** column records 104 respondents amounting to 44.1%. If we sum up the total number of respondents who agree with the statement, we have 180 out of 236 representing 76.27%. The responses under **Strongly Disagree** stand at 13 representing 5.5%, while the option **Disagree** has 32 persons representing 13.6%, and **Uncertain** records 11 representing 4.7% respectively. The result of the finding therefore validates the truth that there is a problem in the course of teaching and learning the Greek language encountered by both the instructors and the learners in Nigeria.

The corresponding responses to question 1 above solicited from interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGD) reveal a corollary and agrees with the above findings. A

greater number of respondents, who were mostly students, submitted that there is a serious challenge with the study of the language because in their words, “we do not have the foundation of learning it from childhood which is the formative period of any meaningful learning, but caught it from the top at the university level”. Students of Gombe State University lamented the situation where the Greek lecturer is a Visiting Lecturer not resident in the State. In view of the policy of the University where in a whole semester covering a study period of three or four months, at most, Visiting Lecturers are limited to only one (1) week of lectures in a month, students therefore learn the Greek subject under stressful condition of 12 contact hours only within the semester of 13 (thirteen) lecture weeks. The lecturers also had to work under pressure covering large course outline that would have been covered under normal situation of 13 whole weeks of lectures.

Certain respondents from the Benue State University Makurdi argued that the difficulty in learning the Greek language lies in the fact that language is learned in a class environment but the best part of efficient learning of the language is done outside the classroom where one builds his vocabulary from the way people express themselves in verbal communication. However, the Greek language learned in the University is strictly by the rules on paper and it is not spoken anywhere within the walls of the institution in Nigeria thus making it difficult to assimilate and apply in practical conversation. A 56-year-old lecturer in the same institution agree that the first difficulty associated with learning the language is the students’ negative attitude toward the Biblical Greek since they consider it impossible ever before starting the learning process. Therefore, the first failure to achieve success is phobia. Secondly, there is the absence of course textbooks with simple learning rules for the students to buy. The third constraint is attempting to learn the subject at an advanced age and levels of education, such as in a degree program without the elementary foundation at the primary school level, thus instead of developing on the already acquired knowledge at this basic level, students are forced to begin the learning process starting with the alphabet and phonetics at the tertiary level where expertise is the target.

Question 2: There is a very low or even lack of interest in learning the biblical Greek in Nigerian Universities, Colleges of Education, and Seminaries

Question two (2) represented by the above assertion obtains the following results: The number that conform to the **Strongly Agree** option were 106 out of the 236 total indicative of 44.9%, while the **Agree** numbered 82 expressing 34.7%, thus if we put together the number that align themselves with the Agree option, we discover that 188 either **Strongly Agree** or **Agree** go with the thinking thus expressing 79.66% of 100%. Those who agree with the **Strongly Disagree** option are numbered 19 out of 236 representing 8.1% and the **Disagree** respondents were also 19 representing 8.1%, while those that sided with the **uncertain** number were 10 representing 4.2%. Considering the responses on question 2 coming from interviews, the following discourses reveal an

agreement with the responses to the questionnaire. Respondents have argued emphatically that many Christians have come to access the Bible translated from the English into their languages, whether the translations are theologically correct or not. The implication of this is that the message had been made simple and easy to understand, and so do not wish to go through the rigors of learning any language that originates the text of the Bible. What makes sense is that the message passed in their dialect makes meaning and is relevant to address their spiritual problems.

Another area where the interest of the learners is waned rests on the relationship of the instructors and the instructed. For instance, some of the teachers of biblical languages – Greek and/or Hebrew – intimidate the students with threat of failure. These instructors lack the patience to painstakingly carry the slow learners through the rigorous and difficult steps of the study, knowing that the learning conditions are quite unfavourable. In the absence of such broadminded resource persons and facilitators, students naturally lose interest in the subject. In the thinking of many students, there are no grounds for developing interest in the study of the Greek language since the Greek Embassy in Nigeria and its government back home is not motivating those who have made concerted efforts to study the language for ease of communicating the Gospel message of salvation. This is unlike the French and Arab Embassies who have shown great interest and give incentives to those who are studying the French and Arabic languages.

Question 3: Enough priority is not given to the study of biblical Greek in the curriculum of Christian or even secular institutions in Nigeria

Our results obtained from Q 3 reflect the following: Those who responded in favour of **Strongly Agree** were 117 in number representing 49.6% while those who selected the **Agree** option totalled 84 representing 35.6% and those in favour of the **Strongly Disagree** option numbered 11 representing 4.7%. The respondents that approved of the **Disagree** alternative were 21 representing 8.9%, while those that aligned with the **Uncertain** preference were 3 in number signifying 1.3% over 100%. During the course of interviews, respondents answered that the study of the Bible and biblical languages as languages of religious and spiritual instructions are not accorded their rightful place in the society. This negligence has adversely affected the policies relating to their curriculum design by the policy makers and governments at the states and the centre. In most Universities and Colleges of Education, for instance, only two semesters are allocated and devoted to the study of the Greek language which is grossly insufficient for any meaningful intellectual and spiritual exercise. The Seminaries are better off though, but the curriculum planners in the secular institutions of learning need to do more by coming up with more innovative and simplified methods of handling the course than what is obtainable in the present. It is unimaginable to think that a student can easily assimilate a language not spoken anywhere and had not been taught at the lower levels of education. A lot of work needs to be done in this regard. This result is instructive in that it upholds

the claim that priority is NOT given to the study of biblical Greek in the curriculum of Christian or secular institutions in Nigeria.

Question 4: The Greek language should be introduced in the Nigerian institutions of learning beginning from the secondary school level as obtainable in the case of English, French, Arabic and other Nigerian languages

An aggregated measurement based on the responses under Q 4 reveal that, respondents who approved of the **Strongly Agree** alternative totalled 147 out of 236 representing 62.3%, whereas those that go with the **Agree** option equalled 52 representing 22.0%. Hence, if we sum up the number that favour the introduction of Greek language starting from the secondary school, we find a cumulative total of 199 representing 84.32%, as against the total number of those in the column of **Strongly Disagree** totalling 16 representing 6.8% and the option **Disagree** totalling 9 representing 3.8% making up a sum of 25 representing 10.59%. The number of respondents who preferred the **Uncertain** option totalled 12 representing 5.1%. The percentage gap between the **Agree** and **Disagree** patterns indicated a high level of acceptability in favour of those who share the Agree options and who are convinced that learning the Greek language should begin at the pre-graduate levels. The null hypothesis is not validated in this regard thus the study of the Greek language is to be considered as a solemn and serious-minded business.

A cursory look at the interviews and FGD analyses aligns with the above assertion in respect of question 4. For example, there is a strong agreement in respect of this question amongst students and their lecturers that most preachers and interpreters depend on the translations, which are sometimes very far from the actual meaning of the original text, which could easily direct their listeners and congregation off course. An example given by some group of students reveal that there was a Pastor of the ECWA Good News Church in Bauchi, Nigeria who once told his congregation at a most critical period of religious crisis in the State that, ‘Jesus said, “if you don’t have a sword, sell your clothes and buy one” in the context of Matthew. The Pastor’s message is aimed at preparing his congregation for self-defense and retaliation against the enemy. This reading and interpretation may have negative effect for the peace and stability of the country. In furtherance with the demands of correct interpretation based on the sound knowledge of the original language of the biblical text, it is important to realize that times and social conditions determine the usage of words, therefore if the writer and reader do not take into consideration the knowledge of the period of writing, the interpreter might most likely make the mistake of giving meaning to a word for today of that which meant something different at the time of writing.

Question 5: The misunderstanding of religious languages has often affected the correct interpretation of the Holy Books in Nigeria

The findings relating to this claim is presented as follows: the number of respondents that answer in the affirmative under the ***Strongly Agree*** option totalled 153 corresponding to 64.8%, while those that support the ***Agree*** option amounted to 68 representing 28.8%. A synopsis of the two positive responses would reveal a statistic in favour of acceptability, which confirms the validity of the claim with a total of 221 respondents representing 93.64% as against the rejection of the claim by the 4 representing 1.7% in favour of the ***Strongly Disagree*** and 7 signifying 3% in support of the ***Disagree*** options. The sum of the latter two opinions reflects only a total of 11 out of 236 in respect of the negating options, representing 4.66%. Meanwhile, those who voted in favour of the ***Uncertain*** option totalled 4 indicating 1.7%. Interview responses and FGD regarding this question revealed that the drawing of false conclusions and implications from biblical texts which inform certain negative reactions from adherents would be drastically reduced with the listeners' fairly good knowledge of biblical languages and meaning of original words. This is so if the pastors are well equipped and trained in the prototype language that produced the biblical text. The practice also entails that misinterpretation, misapplication and misunderstanding would be limited if the interpreter is trained to distinguish between figures of speech, idioms, poetry, proverbs, history, symbols, myths and simple statements of facts. A lecturer from the College of Education Akwanga argued emphatically that there is no connection between the study of the Greek language and violent conflicts in our societies. However, he agrees with the opinion that the misunderstanding of the biblical text and the language of religion could lead to misguided information and unwarranted application capable of igniting conflicts.

Question 6: The study of biblical Greek would help to enhance better interpretation and application of the Bible message and thus discourage the needless violence and conflicts in our society

The question of biblical language has attracted wide interest, thus a broad-based distribution of ideas on the subject across cultural backgrounds and Christian traditions are important and instructive aspects of knowledge seeking. A review of the responses in Q6 indicates that 132 respondents from the lot of 236 affirm the statement under the ***Strongly Agree*** alternative representing 55.9%. The number that aligned itself with the ***Agree*** option numbered 65 signifying 27.5%, while the ***Strongly Disagree*** option received the blessing of 11 respondents representing 4.7%. However, those who supported the ***Disagree*** and ***Uncertain*** options totalled 14 in each case representing 5.9% respectively.

Regarding this question, many interviewees answered in the affirmative. Some of the students argued that during the reign of Alexander the Great, Greek was made the

official language and culture of the Mediterranean world which included Palestine and the far Eastern world hence Greek became the language of the sciences and the arts alike. It is therefore not out of place to encourage students of the Arts and Humanities and the Sciences to learn the language. They further submitted that many of the languages of the world such as English, French, Latin, German, Polish etc., have their roots in the Greek language. The belief of some students of religion and language studies is that understanding the Greek language has helped to shape their pronunciation of English words better, for example, where hitherto they pronounced such words with a “th” (Greek θ) as if it were a “d” (Greek δ) or “t” (Greek τ) thus, – “the” is often pronounced as “de”; “brother” pronounced as “broder”; and “three” pronounced as “tree”, etc. However, with even the little knowledge of the Greek language, they now could get the correct pronunciation of these words. The opinion of some university students was that Christianity has been one of the oldest religions of the world and in Nigeria therefore the National Universities Commission (NUC) should set in motion a policy where the Greek language which is the official language of the New Testament should be incorporated among the existing General Studies courses (GST) for all undergraduate students irrespective of the course of study and the students’ area of specialisation. The result of the survey validates the hypothesis that a redesign of the curriculum to accommodate longer study periods, and the provision of adequate learning facilities with well-equipped biblical language laboratory would enhance scientific and spiritual knowledge thus promoting salvation theorem.

Question 7: I support the study of the Greek language for all students, irrespective of the areas of specialization (i.e., Natural, Human, Environmental and Social Sciences; the Law; and the Arts and Humanities, alike)

Based on the T-Test measurement in respect of the Q7 assertion, the following results were obtained: First, the number of respondents that answer in the affirmative in support of the **Strongly Agree** option totalled 102 translating into 43.2%, whereas the number that favoured the **Agree** choice equalled 76 representing 32.2%. The latter stands against the former in the comparative calculation in which 18 respondents favour the **Strongly Disagree** option, representing 7.6% and 26 who supported the **Disagree** option representing 11%. However, those that were uncertain of this claim numbered 14 out of the 236 respondents representing 5.9% of the total. An interesting comment from a lecturer at Benue State University (BSU) during an interaction states: “The study of the Greek language has tremendously improved my English grammar, word formation and syntax”. Many of the students interviewed tie in with this reasoning and added that the Greek language has not just simply engendered their proficiency in the English and other languages, both local and international, but also their better understanding of the language of science, especially Mathematics. Accordingly, a Tiv scholar admitted that understanding Greek has helped in a better perception and appreciation of the English

translation of the Bible into his local Tiv dialect. Hence, nothing is more rewarding than having a grasp of the biblical message in one's own native language based on the original text. The result of the investigation on this claim supports the fact that in almost all areas of the human endeavour the Greek language has relevance, significance and interpretative value and so students of other fields of studies can be encouraged to learn the language, if not as aspects of their main courses, as a course to be numbered among the General Studies (GS) courses.

Question 8: The study of Greek language would greatly influence or enhance my proficiency in understanding other languages and the general knowledge of the field of my study

In analyzing the substance of this statement, we discover from the results obtained that out of the responses of the 236 respondents under review, 110 reinforced the **Strongly Agree** option representing 46.6%, while those in support of the **Agree** alternative numbered 88 translating into 37.3%. Conversely, the number of respondents that supported the **Strongly Disagree** alternate totalled 11 in all representing 4.7% and those in favour of the **Disagree** option numbered 13 representing 5.5%, while those that were uncertain of the claim totalled 14 signifying 5.9%. With regard to the above statement interviewees made the following recommendations: (i) the course should be given sui generis and its rightful place among the religious languages such as Arabic for Muslims and Latin for the Roman Catholic; (ii) more time should be devoted to the study of the subject by those in the core course area, thus instead of two semesters allotted for the study of the course, four to six semesters would be more appreciative for those in the Universities; (iii) the publishing of locally produced Greek text books should be encouraged and supported; (iv) institutions of learning right from the secondary schools could encourage students to form Greek Language Clubs where activities like quiz contests and other exercises thrive to develop the students' skills, cognitive development, interests and intellectual competitiveness in language studies. Consequently, the best performing students should be encouraged with winner prizes while all the other participants should go with consolation prizes to motivate them further for subsequent participation; (v) standard facilities and computers with inbuilt Greek software and auditory CDs should be provided to facilitate the teaching and learning of the language at the higher levels. This would rhyme well only where qualified and language proficiency teachers are employed to handle the instructional processes from the lower to the higher levels of education.

Question 9: The establishment of a functional Centre for the Study of Biblical Languages equipped with a language laboratory in the Universities will enhance the study of the language in Nigeria

An evaluation of the statement under the Q9 column reveals that out of the responses from the 236 questionnaires returned, 148 respondents affirmed the assertion under the **Strongly Agree** option representing 62.7%, while 70 aligned themselves with the **Agree** option representing 29.7%. A further analysis reveal that of the 236 respondents, 6 decided on the **Strongly Disagree** option representing 2.5%, This statistic also follows for the number that adopted the **Disagree** and **Uncertain** options representing in each case the same percentage of 2.5% respectively. The whole idea revolves round the philosophy that a functional Centre of Excellence for the Study of Biblical Languages equipped with a language laboratory in the Universities would inevitably enhance the study of the language in Nigeria, which addresses the query of question 9. For instance, students of Gombe State University cited an example with the Centre for International Islamic Research Institute in their University, which is a Centre for the promotion of Islamic religious language, civilization and spirituality. Christianity can establish and/or replicate such similar institute for the promotion of Christian biblical languages, philosophy, civilization and spirituality. The results of the findings undoubtedly validates the claim that the provision of a functional Centre for the Study of Biblical Languages with well-equipped language laboratory will promote and facilitate the study of the Greek and other related languages.

Question 10: The study of the biblical Greek should be made compulsory for Pastors, Priests, Evangelists and Bishops

From our investigation, the data in respect of Q. 10 which was so designed to solicit information on Christian religious leaders and to support their ministerial needs, respondents' interpretation reflect the following statistics: First, out of the responses received from the 236 respondents, 170 were identified to have agreed with the statement that the biblical Greek language be made compulsory for the stated categories of Christians, which represents 72.0% which is the highest of all the responses in favour of the **Strongly Agree** option for all the Questions 1-10. The number of respondents that supported the **Agree** option totalled 48 indicating 20.3%, while those that endorsed the **Strongly Disagree** differential were 7 in number representing 3.0%. A total number of 8 respondents affirmed the **Disagree** position representing 3.4%, while those that fallback on the **Uncertain**-option were 3 in number representing 1.3%.

A great number of respondents during the interview were of the opinion that the task of promoting the New Testament Greek and other biblical languages in Nigeria lies fundamentally with the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) in collaboration with missionaries of good will. They hold the deep conviction that many of our elected

Christian-oriented politicians at the Federal and State levels, especially the National and State Assemblies, are members of CAN belonging to one Church denomination or the other. As custodians of the laws of the land and ambassadors of peace, they can play key roles in promoting the study of biblical languages by sponsoring brilliant and interested students and lecturers overseas, where the training facilities are readily available, to learn the languages and in turn become the Trainers of Trainees (TOTs) in Nigeria. Second, Christian societies and organizations should converge and engage in maximum discussion on how to promote the study of the biblical languages and prepare well-articulated budget on how to source, run and manage funds received from Christian organizations outside the country, the Greek and Jewish Embassies, Non-Governmental Organizations and other societies or sponsoring bodies for the biblical language project.

APPRAISAL OF FINDINGS

In the journey of life there are good times and bad times, ups and downs, smooth and rough roads. However, God promised to be with humanity every step of the way as we journey on this transient earth (cf. Matt. 28:20). The records of our sojourn on earth are important, that is why the Bible contains information about the important events and practices in the history of human life expressed in language, and which demands sharing, understanding and knowledgeableness for application within concrete life-settings. It is this language expression that links people with their cultural identities and heritage, and determines who they are. The language of the Bible is therefore important for the understanding of who the Christian really is and how to behave and connect with the realities of life. Peoples around the world tap into the realities of what life offers through expressing their thoughts in the most coherent language that they understand best and at home with its terminologies. Against this reality, those who use the Bible as their guide to life and as the Word of God for life blossom with the knowledge of its language of expression to live life as God truly wants them to be socially, mentally, psychologically and spiritually. Thus, being at home with the original languages of the Bible gives the preacher and the persons learned in the first language an edge over the one that lacks expertise in the area.

The implications of studying the biblical Greek are far-reaching but not without considering its major challenges so as to address them:

- i. Dearth of information and well-equipped language facilitators to handle the quality of knowledge dissemination and acquisition in the sacred languages. We know, from the report of our investigations, that our institutions of learning are ill-equipped with little or no teaching staff who have acquired First Degree (B. A.), Masters' Degree (M. A.) and/or Doctorate Degree (Ph.D.) in Biblical languages – Hebrew and/or Greek. More so, even those that have acquired the highest academic qualification in Biblical Studies New Testament and Old Testament are not degree holders in the biblical language areas per se. Therefore, their

knowledge of the languages is not profound enough to equip them for the service of engaged biblical language studies.

- ii. Quality education demands availability of resources and learning facilities. However, shortage of training equipment for the effective learning of the biblical Greek language is a major area of concern in Nigeria. This is coupled with the non-availability of biblical language study centres with well-equipped language laboratories for engaged proficiency and productivity where full fledged qualified academic staff would be trained for effective service. It is reasoned that when such a centre is established in our university, post graduate courses would be mounted with the availability of well-furnished boardrooms and lecture theatres similar to the Quranic Studies Centres in some Universities in northern Nigeria where experts are trained in Arabic and other related eastern languages.
- iii. It is evident that to be tutored and learned in the first language of communication is fundamental for excellence in the education of people. Thus, students who have not been opportune to learn the Greek language from the formative and early stages of their educational career naturally face difficulties in their literacy development, skills acquisition and proficiency in the language. This informs the reason for lack of interest in the subject at the higher level of learning by many of the students in Nigerian Universities and Colleges of Education. The situation is worsened with the very low level of interest by Christians themselves who in the pursuit of knowledge emphasize the sciences over and above knowledge which has to do with the Christian faith in which the biblical languages are inevitably associated. This is unlike the attitude of Muslims toward their Islamic religion, which is for them the foundation of all knowledge, beliefs and practices. The Arabic language which is the language of the Qur'an controls the thinking, emotions and actions of the Muslim therefore the language is sacrosanct and indispensable for their socio-political, economic and spiritual activism in the world.
- iv. The general lack of interest in the study of Christian Religious Knowledge, which dovetails into the deficit of interest in the study of the languages of the Bible naturally translate into insignificant attention accorded the subject with regard to the national policy formulation on education in that area. This fact results in the reason why the study of the language is not given priority and its rightful place in the curriculum of Christian education in Nigeria. Against this backdrop, the time and importance allocated to the study of these languages are grossly inadequate to make any significant impact, meaning and behavioural change to satisfy the learners' aspirations for intellectualism, spirituality and socio-moral excellence.

CONCLUSION

Assessing the strength of the arguments presented in response to both the statements in the questionnaire and the unrestricted research questions, the investigation has shown that the hypotheses developed to achieve the research objectives were validated, thus the study is attainable, plausible and significantly relevant. It is obvious from our survey that in view of the dearth of readily available learning materials, teaching aids, inadequate study time, limited resources and qualified resource persons, the learning of the biblical Greek language becomes a serious challenge for Nigerian students, pastors and scholars. The problem is aggravated where certain variables like lack of interest, the unspoken nature of the language as that which belongs to the long-forgotten past, non-encouragement by the Christian organizations or institutions, and unfavourable educational policies of government set in and confront the learners. The report proceeds to show that the study of any human language is an indispensable element of the group's culture, beliefs, identity and functional participation in socio-economic, cultural, spiritual and political life of a people. Most significantly, since the biblical Greek deals with the core means of communication within members of God's Christo-type community, more preference and place of importance should be accorded to it by its sharers. The study has created opportunity for peoples of diverse cultures and social backgrounds who share in the message of God's saving grace in Christ to benefit from the information and knowledge of that ancient Greek language as the choicest means of communicating and inculcating scientific, practical and spiritual ideas aimed at salvation.

SUGGESTIONS ON THE WAY FORWARD

A project on biblical languages, especially the biblical Greek is the key to practical knowledge in the various areas of human endeavours. As means of preserving the culture of God's economy of salvation presented in His revealed Word, there are basic roadmaps for achieving the prospects and objectives of such salvation projects. The following would serve as some suggestions for further research and the way forward:

- i. To sustain the originality of the Bible languages and their original meaning for today, it is imperative to mount a degree program in Biblical languages – Hebrew, Greek, and Latin – as full department with study of related languages such as German, Aramaic, Arabic, Chinese, Hindi, Spanish, Swedish and Russian – for achieving far-reaching Christian evangelization process.
- ii. Appeal to well-meaning Christians and Christian Organizations/Institutions worldwide to donate funds and/or support the creation of a Centre of Excellence for Biblical Language Studies in the University of Jos, in the heart and centre of Nigeria to facilitate the promotion of Christian religious languages and cross-cultural mission in Africa.

- iii. As prelude to mounting the language program, local Churches, NGOs, the Greek Embassy, World Council of Churches, or group sponsors can select the best students and teachers of biblical Greek and offer them scholarship awards to study the language abroad. The scholars would serve as pioneer experts to train those in the Centre of Excellence for Biblical Language Studies who, in turn, would train those at the pre-secondary and secondary school levels in the rudiments of Biblical Greek language.

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