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EDITORIAL NOTE

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From Policy to Practice: Governance, Education, and Social Transformation in Africa:

Welcome to the October 2026 issue of the Journal of Contemporary Society and Education (JCSE). The sixteen articles assembled in this volume reflect the journal's commitment to rigorous, interdisciplinary scholarship on the pressing social, political, and educational challenges confronting contemporary Africa. Together, they illuminate a central tension of our time: the persistent gap between policy ambition and lived reality.

Several contributions in this issue grapple directly with the question of governance and service delivery. Motadi examines the opportunities and barriers shaping digital transformation in South African government departments, while Moloto and Pillay explore technology's influence on governance at the local municipal level. Akindele, Sanni, and Lamidi assess citizen satisfaction with public transportation in Lagos State, offering an important reminder that the legitimacy of the state rests on the quality of everyday services. Jutta and Alao interrogate the democratisation of the administrative state through South Africa's Government of National Unity, and Okudolo examines decentralisation and the effectiveness of local political leaders in Nigeria. Kambiri's analysis of governance challenges in managing internal displacement further underscores the consequences of normative commitment without implementation capacity. Agbor's critical perspectives on the operational independence of Elections Cameroon and the Constitutional Council round out this focus on democratic institutions.

Education remains a cornerstone of social progress, and this issue devotes considerable attention to it. Mtshali and Meyiwa assess the role of climate change education in maritime studies, while Modiba asks whether rural secondary schools are adequately managing learners with special educational needs associated with HIV/AIDS. Babalola interrogates the legal and policy complexities of foreign partnerships in Nigerian higher education, and Shabangu examines how school management teams respond to violence in rural South African schools. Nephawe and Mudimeli offer a distinctive contribution on the indispensability of English as a lingua franca in interpreting selected Pauline epistles.

The issue also foregrounds questions of gender, culture, and well-being. Nesane and Amaechi explore *Mamalo* as a resource for gender equality and women's empowerment in Limpopo, while Gudani, Khosa, and Nomatshila examine adolescents' perceptions of child support grant management through a family systems lens. Matheere offers an

exploration of the life journey of traditional healers in rural Limpopo, and Nkuna and colleagues provide an analytical study of compounding and naming in Siswati personal names. These articles remind us that social transformation is experienced at the level of culture, family, and community.

Collectively, these contributions demonstrate the vitality and breadth of contemporary social science research in Africa. They challenge scholars and policymakers alike to move beyond policy pronouncements toward meaningful implementation. We thank our authors and reviewers for their dedication and trust that this issue will stimulate further inquiry and debate.

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TABLE OF CONTENT

1. Presidential Elections As Participation In The Conduct Of Public Affairs Of A Country: Critical Perspectives On The Operational Independence Of Elections Cameroon (Elecam) And The Constitutional Council Avitus A. Agbor	7
2. Navigating The Green Transition: Assessing The Role Of Climate Change Education In Maritime Studies On Fostering Environmental Sustainability <i>Nhlanhla Mtshali, Ayanda Meyiwa</i>	29
3. Global Degrees, Local Dilemmas: Legal And Policy Complexities Of Foreign Partnerships In Nigerian Higher Education Grace Olubunmi Babalola, Abiodun Gbolagade	55
4. From Normative Commitment To Implementation Failure: Governance Challenges In Managing Internal Displacement In Africa Daniel Kambiri	89
5. Interrogating The Nexus Between Decentralization By Devolution And Effectiveness Of Local Political Leaders In Nigeria: Envisioning Beyond The Present Ikemefuna Taire Paul Okudolo	124
6. Citizen Satisfaction And Public Transportation In Lagos State: A Study Of Lagos State Metropolitan Transportation Agency <i>Iyiola Tomilayo Akindele Oluwole Kazeem Sanni, Kazeem Oyedele Lamidi</i>	147
7. Analysing The Influence Of Technology On Governance In South African Local Municipalities Phuti Ignatius Moloto Rosinah Pillay	176

8. An Analytical Study Of The Intersection Between Compounding And Naming:
A Case Study Of Siswati Personal Names

Khulisile Judith Nkuna, Nkosinathi Macdonald Lusenga, Sikhumbuzo Sibusiso Khoza, Sikhumbuzo Sibusiso Khoza

198

9. Adolescents' Perceptions Of Child Support Grant Management And Its Effects
On Well-Being In South Africa: A Family Systems Perspective

Lilimu Donald Gudani, Vinny Ntiyiso Khosa, Zanele Benedict Nomatshila

219

10. An Exploration Of The Life Journey Of Traditional Healers In Rural Areas: A
Case Study Based In Mohokone Village, Mopani District In Limpopo

Mahlomula Leften Matheere

243

11. From Policy To Practice: School Management Teams' Responses To School
Violence In Rural South African Schools

Maria Thobile Shabangu

261

12. Digital Governance And Transparency: Leveraging E-Government Systems To
Combat Corruption In South Africa

Motadi Masa Sylvester

280

13. Managing Learners With Special Educational Needs Associated With Hiv/Aids:
Are Rural Secondary Schools Coping?

Ngwako Solomom Modiba

304

14. Democratising The Administrative State: The South African Government Of
National Unity As A Framework For Professionalisation And Accountability

Lusanda Beauty Juta, Olaleke Michael Alao

329

15. Mamalo As A Resource For Gender Equality And Women Empowerment In
Vhembe District Communities Of Limpopo Province, South Africa

Nesane N.P, Mudau T.J, Amaechi K.E

352

16. Investigating The Indispensability Of English As A *Lingua Franca* In The
Explanation Of Selected Apostle Paul's Epistles

Farisani Thomas Nephawe, Lufuluvhi Maria Mudimeli

373

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INVESTIGATING THE INDISPENSABILITY OF ENGLISH AS A *LINGUA FRANCA* IN THE EXPLANATION OF SELECTED APOSTLE PAUL'S EPISTLES

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Abstract

The English language is indispensable in explaining the Apostle Paul's epistles because it serves as a lingua franca. However, some readers and listeners whose mother tongue is not English face challenges in understanding the intended message from the epistles. English language is relevant for disseminating the gospel to listeners and readers worldwide. Grounded in Canale and Swain's communicative competence framework, the current study investigated the indispensability of using English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) in explaining selected epistles of the Apostle Paul. The population consisted of two hundred and sixty-seven (267) members of different denominations in the Thohoyandou area, Limpopo Province, South Africa. A qualitative study approach was adopted to obtain an in-depth understanding of the indispensability of English to convey the Apostle Paul's epistles to people. Eighteen (16) church members participated in the study based on their availability and willingness to provide data to the researchers. Semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted in their respective churches. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data collected from the participants because it packages codes and organises the patterns from the transcripts. The findings from both the Philippians and the Ephesians indicate that English can easily refer to the specific theological vocabulary, rhetorical terms, and key metaphors required to accurately convey their distinct themes, as in Grace, Gift, and Workmanship from Ephesians 2:8–10 and Philippians 2:10. This study implies that English can promote the understanding of the

message. The limitations of this study are time and sample size, as it was conducted only on church days and only 16 participants were interviewed. The study argues that English is suitable for preaching the Apostle Paul's epistles due to its simplicity in understanding the language structures.

Keywords: *Apostle, Bible, Christian fellowship, Epistle, New Testament*

Introduction

The study of the English language in this age of globalisation is essential (Mongkolhutthi, 2026). The English language is dominant and crucial worldwide because it facilitates global communication (Gapbassova et al., 2026). It is highly recognised for its strong background, international acclaim, and easy access for many (Satpute, 2026; Wierzbicka & Sadow, 2026). In multilingual, multicultural countries, the study of English remains important, although its spread is limited to certain areas or pockets of the world Yeskeldi (2026). Knowledge of English language skills for comprehension, such as listening, reading and communication, including speaking and writing, is necessary to convey the intended meanings (Mongkolhutthi, 2026). Thus, English competence can enhance the understanding of many biblical gospels. Based on these essentials of English, the connection between English and biblical interpretation is a prerequisite.

Fenilli et al. (2026) propose the following reasons that make English indispensable among the community of

languages: 1) Resource availability, 2) Bridging the talent gap and logistical Efficiency. However, the noticeable challenges are 1) Information dilution, because meaning is often lost or shifted, and subtle cultural contexts or non-equivalent concepts present in the source text might be flattened during the initial translation into English (Khodary & Elsayed, 2026). They are a form of 'source-language interference', where the final target text in the minority language can become overly influenced by English syntax and structure (anglicisation), rather than adhering to its own natural grammatical model (Almusharraf, 2026; Rao, 2019). Furthermore, it has semantic errors where errors made during the first leg into English are inherently amplified in the second leg of the translation.

English as a *Lingua Franca* (ELF) concerns the use of English as a shared means of communication among speakers of different first languages and cultural backgrounds (Pretorius & Van de Poel, 2026). Despite being defined simply as "English used between non-native speakers" (Gapbassova et al., 2026), ELF refers to a dynamic, variable,

and multilingual communicative practice in which speakers negotiate meaning, accommodate one another's linguistic resources and adapt their language to achieve camaraderie and understanding. The use of ELF may involve assorted linguistic forms, strategies and communicative resources (Maurranen, 2027).

On the one hand, ELF concerns communication using English among speakers with different linguistic backgrounds, whereas a pivot language is an intermediary in translation. In Christian contexts, English may be used to communicate biblical teachings, sermons, theological ideas and missionary messages across linguistic boundaries (Tardel, 2021). On the other hand, in a multilingual African community, a preacher might use English to communicate with a congregation, while another widely understood African language may function as an intermediary language for people who do not understand English well. Nevertheless, it risks source-language interference and cultural nuance (Owais et al., 2025).

Furthermore, the minority-language speakers receive content that would otherwise never be translatable (Muñoz et al., 2025). It is used to quickly obtain information in areas including health crises or legal aid. However, linguists push for "direct translation" and build more resources, so minority languages are not always filtered through English

(Kim, 2026; Maganaka, 2026). They start translation immediately to make it easier to translate accurately into the second language (L2), add context notes for translators, use translators who are native in the target language, build a glossary base in the minority language, back-translate, conduct community reviews and avoid cultural copying of the text (Hirschenberger, 2017).

Using English as an ELF is also useful in preaching the gospel from Philipians and Ephesians (Nurmyradova et al., 2026), as many Christians globally do not speak Greek or Hebrew. (Kurniadi & Octavianus, 2026). Nevertheless, speakers/writers and listeners/readers with great ideas but weaker English might get talked over, or their messages sound "less confident" even if the idea is solid (Das, 2026; Estera et al., 2026). Hence, English can connect creators and audiences of the gospel worldwide (Kirkpatrick, 2024) as it facilitates a shared understanding of the scriptures among English- and non-English-speaking communities through discussion, study, and worship. Therefore, English is a vital tool for disseminating the biblical message and its impact on individuals and cultures worldwide (Głaz, 2019).

As English is a common language for theological discussions, scholars and researchers from diverse linguistic backgrounds can share insights and interpretations of the Gospels appropriately (Asamoah &

Acheampong, 2026). Through English, the knowledge of the Apostle Paul's letters can be disseminated to wider communities than they were limited to in other languages. Furthermore, studying Paul's letters in English allows scholarly analysis and an in-depth understanding of theological contributions (Maganaka, 2026).

The English Bible, particularly the King James Version, has had a profound influence on English literature, vocabulary, and idioms (Wierzbicka & Sadow, 2026). Learning English helps appreciate these influences and understand the Bible's historical and cultural context. A solid grasp of English grammar and vocabulary helps identify potential errors in translations or interpretations when encountering complex theological concepts or controversial passages (Asamoah & Acheampong, 2026). In this regard, by understanding the nuances of English, people can gain a deeper appreciation for the beauty and intentionality of Philippians and Ephesians (Dsouza, 2020). Most missionaries receive specialised training in cultural specifics and attend English language schools to communicate the Gospel truth in their assigned setting (Musetti, 2026). To date, many churches and their spiritual leaders have become preoccupied with learning the languages and customs of English culture. The weight of speaking the Good News with clarity to younger generations, who are less church-oriented according to most demographic

studies, has become a noteworthy shift in the assignment to make disciples of all nations (Branson & Martinez, 2023).

The Book of Ephesians may reflect the ancient Mediterranean world, which can be unfamiliar to modern readers from diverse cultural backgrounds (Ivory, 2019). Alternatively, symbols, metaphors, and imagery in the text may have different meanings or associations across cultures and languages. Additionally, understanding the social, historical, and political context of the original audience may not be crucial for accurate interpretation, as words may have different meanings and associations across cultures (Umeanwe, 2026). They may struggle with language or literacy barriers, hindering their ability to engage with the text. On the other hand, the increasing diversity of global Christianity may pose challenges for interpreters seeking to accommodate varied perspectives and contexts (Alexandra, 2025).

English facilitates the sharing of perspectives and insights across cultural boundaries, promoting a deeper understanding of the biblical text. The biblical interpretation can be contextualised within diverse cultural settings, making it more relevant and applicable. Comparative analysis of biblical texts across different cultures and languages can be achieved; critical thinking and reflection on one's assumptions and biases are encouraged (Ivory, 2019). English makes biblical

texts more accessible to a broader audience and facilitates collaboration among scholars and readers from diverse backgrounds. ELF serves as a bridge, connecting Paul's ancient words with a global audience and facilitating the continued relevance and impact of his gospel messages.

Paul was named Saul, after Israel's first king. As a man of good standing in the community, Paul held the privileged status of Roman citizen, an honour rarely conferred upon Jews (Wallace, 2002). This legal advantage was inherited by Paul, who had been raised in a Hellenistic society in Tarsus (Umeanwe, 2026). God exposed Paul to a broad spectrum of experiences and education, equipping him with the tools to effectively spread the Gospel and establish the church throughout the Roman Empire (Lowrie, 2020). He did not invent the epistles (letters), written sometime between *Anno Domini* (AD) 48 and AD 64 (Tilly, 2026), as a literary form, but rather as a common means of communication and instruction in the Near East in antiquity. To understand Paul's religious teaching, ELF knowledge can assist people in interpreting the gospel without failure (Hutchins, 2026). As Paul's epistles were written for specific occasions, ELF can enhance understanding of the gospel for people whose native language is not English, Greek or Roman.

Furthermore, Paul spoke, wrote, and read Aramaic and Hebrew, having grown up in Jerusalem under Jewish teachers who used those languages, and had acquired a good understanding of the Greek language and culture. In his letters, Paul varied themes, images, and ideas that reflected ancient cultures and have shaped Christianity's understanding of its relationship to Judaism and the OT and taught what man must do to be right with God and what God does for all people through His persistent grace (Aquinas, 2026). Standhartinger (2025) postulates that Paul's letters to date cause many to be spiritually shaken. However, the irony of Paul's letters, the Ephesians, is that they were written to all churches that were spiritually struggling (Melick Jr, 2026). Competence in ELF can necessitate an understanding of this message. Thus, this study explores the use of ELF, highlighting its implications for cross-cultural understanding and biblical interpretation of the two epistles as follows:

Ephesians

The ELF promotes the understanding of Paul's teachings centred around a few key themes, including salvation through grace, the unity of believers in Christ, and living a transformed life. (Reaves, 2024). His theme emphasises that salvation cannot be earned by works or human effort, but is a gift received through faith in Jesus Christ (Hutchins,

2026). Additionally, this letter emphasises the unity of all believers in the Church, regardless of their background, culture, or customs. This is because it is part of God's plan to reconcile all things to Himself through Christ. He advises Christian believers to put off their old sinful ways by putting on the new self (Standhartinger, 2025) and to live out their new identity in Christ. This includes hands-on submission in several relationships and resisting the temptations of the surrounding culture. In his letters, Paul likens the Church to one body and highlights the unity of believers in Christ and their oneness with Christ as the head (Lowrie, 2020), a central theme that Paul develops throughout the rest of the letter.

Paul briefly visited Ephesus before returning to establish a strong church presence there over three years, during which the gospel spread widely throughout Asia Minor (Cooper, 2026). He later gave a farewell address to the Ephesian elders that closely parallels themes in the Epistle to the Ephesians. The book of Ephesians 5:22-6:9 outlines hierarchical roles in the household, which some interpret as mutual submission, while others see it as unilateral. The outline of the Book of Ephesians involves the greeting from Paul to the church of Ephesus (Ephesians [1:1-2](#)), a general account of the blessings that the [gospel](#) reveals (Lowrie, 2020, including the source of these blessings, the means by which they are attained, the reason they are given,

and their final result (Ephesians [1:3-2:10](#)). The gospel reveals a description of the change in the spiritual position of [Gentiles](#) as a result of the work of Christ (Ephesians 2:11-3:21), unity amid the diversity of gifts among believers (Ephesians 4:1-16), [instructions about ordinary life and different relationships](#) (Ephesians 4:17-6:9). In this regard, the ELF helps the audiences to understand the Ephesians' epistles and promote people's belief (Hutchins, 2026).

Ephesians reveals God's overarching purpose to reconcile all things in Christ, both in heaven and on earth, including the unity of believers and the ultimate restoration of all creation (Eusebius, 2026). In his teachings, Paul posits that God will gather all things together in Christ in the dispensation of the fullness of times. In Ephesians 4:17 and 6:24, Paul encourages the Saints to abandon their sins and to show grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul teaches that God will gather all things together in Christ in the dispensation of the fullness of times. Ephesians 4:17-6:24. First, he provides instruction regarding children and parents (Ephesians 6:1-4). Second, he gives instructions for the relationship between masters and servants. Ephesians 4-6: In 4:1-6, Paul calls them to live out the oneness that God has created when he joined them together in Christ (Küster, 2017). As the church is one new people, Paul calls them to live out the oneness that God has created when he joined them together in Christ (Ephesians 4:1-6). In English, the

message regarding redemption and grace is central (Gapbassova et al., 2026). Ephesians 2:8-9 states that "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast." (Cooper, 2026).

The EF can facilitate cross-cultural understanding of the themes in the Book of Ephesians, as it is a common language for global communication and an ideal language for conveying biblical themes across cultures (Küster, 2017). Learners from diverse backgrounds can engage with the Book of Ephesians, promoting a unified understanding of its themes (Dsouza, 2020). It incorporates cultural insights and nuances, helping learners understand the historical and cultural context of the Book of Ephesians, facilitating cross-cultural comparisons, enabling them to identify similarities and differences between their culture and the biblical text's cultural context, and encouraging critical thinking and reflection on its themes and messages.

According to Gapbassova et al. (2026), learners can explore how the biblical themes relate to their own cultural and personal contexts, promoting a deeper understanding of the text. Again, ELF fosters intercultural awareness, enabling learners to appreciate and respect cultural differences, develop practical communication skills essential for navigating diverse cultural contexts, and facilitate cross-cultural understanding (Maganaka, 2026). Therefore, using

ELF enhances cross-cultural awareness and cultivates practical communication skills. Using ELF, many listeners/readers and, speakers and writers from diverse backgrounds can interpret the Book of Ephesians meaningfully, promote a more inclusive understanding of the text, contextualise the biblical message within diverse cultural settings, and enhance its relevance and applicability (Maganaka, 2026). Nevertheless, Gapbassova et al. (2026) postulate that if the ELF is not used to interpret the message, the challenges and limitations may not fully address the complexities of linguistic and cultural differences.

Philippians

Philippi was a Roman colony in ancient Macedonia (Evangelidis, 2025), founded by retired soldiers and known for its patriotic nationalism (Silva, 2005). The Book of Philippians is a letter written by the Apostle Paul, also known as a Pauline epistle, to the church in Philippi (Silva, 2005). It emphasises themes of joy, humility, love, service, suffering (that believers may face), and encourages them to find strength and joy in Christ during these times, as well as the importance of focusing on Christian living and unity (Berry, 1997). Paul's letter to the Christians at Philippi was written while he was in prison somewhere (Phil 1:7, 13, 14, 17), indeed in danger of death (Phil 1:20-23). Philippians is outlined as follows: Paul's gratitude (Philippians 1:1-26), imitating

Jesus Christ (Philippians 1:27, 2:18, and 2:19-30), self-humbling and pressing toward the goal (Philippians 2:1-4). Lacks anxiety (Philippians 3:13-14) and talks about life during times of suffering (Philippians 4:6).

Philippians is deeply rooted in the Gospel message (Evangelidis, 2025). Paul often refers to the Gospel, Christ's sacrifice, and the believer's union with Christ. Philippians offers Paul's perspective on how to live out the Christian faith, particularly in the face of hardship and opposition (Salcedo, 2026). They explore how believers should live out their faith in response to the Gospel. In Philippians 2:5-8, Paul writes, "Let the same attitude be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God (Berry, 1997), did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born of a woman, being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross." In Chapter 1, Paul reminds his readers that they would both believe and suffer for Christ: "For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only think. In trying to explain this passage meaningfully, ELF is relevant because the gospel was written in Greek/Roman (Seidlhofer, 2011).

Ivory (2019) claims that in nature, there are limitations, such as: 1) Vocabulary limitations, such as "fellowship" (Phil.

1:5), where users may not be familiar with certain words or phrases, leading to frequent misunderstandings and 2) Cultural references like citizenship in Philippians 3:20: "*Our citizenship is in heaven.*", as some users may not be familiar with ELF and may require additional explanation or context. Hirschenberger (2017) indicates that the cultural challenges include 1) Cultural nuances, where ELF users may not be familiar with the cultural context of the Book of Philippians, translating into misinterpretation. 2) Different cultural values reflecting the values of the ancient Mediterranean world, such as Christ's humility and self-sacrifice as an ideal (Philippians 2:5–11) distinct from those of ELF users. In the context of challenges with contextualisation, ELF users may require assistance in contextualising the message within their cultural context.

Moreover, Wierzbicka and Sadow (2026) suggest that communication challenges involve 1) Clarity, where ELF users struggle to understand complex theological concepts or biblical terminology. 2) Effective communication involving communicating the message accurately and relevant to ELF users can be cumbersome. 3) Feedback and discussion, where encouraging ELF users to ask questions, provide feedback, and engage in discussion can be difficult, especially in a multilingual setting (Muñoz et al., 2025). Lastly, theological challenges centre on 1) theological

terminology, which ELF users may not be familiar with. 2) Interpretation involving ELF users who may have different interpretations leads to disagreements or misunderstandings. 3) Application, where assisting ELF users in applying the teachings to their everyday lives can be a big challenge (Maganaka, 2026). Therefore, the distinction between difficulty from the original biblical text itself and difficulty arising as the text is being communicated or interpreted using ELF is evident.

When the concept of ELF is applied to the Book of Philippians, it reveals joy and gratitude by emphasising the importance of happiness and appreciation, even in challenging circumstances (Küster, 2017). For example, Paul writes that believers must rejoice always, even when things are hard. This is because joy comes from knowing Jesus, not from our circumstances. Also, it concerns humility and servanthood, using simple language to describe the importance of these qualities (Musetti, 2026), as modelled by Jesus and emphasised in Philippians. For example, Jesus showed believers what it means to be humble and serve others by following his example, putting others before themselves and looking for ways to serve (Maganaka, 2026). Additionally, it concerns partnership in the gospel by explaining the concept of partnership in the gospel, for example, 'Paul thanks the Philippians for their support and

partnership in spreading the gospel. The believers can partner with others to share the good news of Jesus.

In this study, the major themes are unity, reconciliation, and the church's role in God's plan. In contrast, the letter to the Philippians deals with joy, fellowship, and the Christian life (Salcedo, 2026). To compare the themes, tones, and language use in Ephesians and Philippians, both letters emphasise the importance of unity and relationships within the church. Nevertheless, the letter of Ephesians focuses on the unity of all believers in Christ, while Philippians emphasises the unity of Paul and the Philippians in the gospel. In essence, both letters have a high Christology (Lowrie, 2020).

The criteria for comparing the books of Ephesians and Philippians include vocabulary and terminology, which are difficult words or theological expressions; idiomatic expressions, expressions whose meanings may not be obvious to ELF users; cultural references, references based on the ancient Mediterranean/Greco-Roman context; metaphors and figurative language, expressions whose meaning may be culturally dependent. Syntactic and grammatical complexity is another criterion as it entails long sentences and structures that may challenge ELF users. The last criterion involves a distinction between textual and ELF difficulties to determine whether a difficulty is inherent in the biblical text or

created/amplified by communication among people using ELF.

Ephesians emphasises Christ's role in creation and the church, while Philippians focuses on Christ's humility and exaltation. Furthermore, both letters encourage believers to grow in their faith. Ephesians specifically emphasises the importance of spiritual maturity, while Philippians encourages believers to rejoice and be content in all circumstances (Lowrie, 2020). The book of Ephesians is often described as majestic, grand, and celebratory, emphasising the riches of God's grace and the unity of the church (Standhartinger, 2025). In contrast, the tone of Philippians is warm, affectionate, and joyful, with a strong emphasis on Paul's personal relationship with the Philippians and his gratitude for their support.

The language in Ephesians is often complex and dense, featuring long sentences and elaborate metaphors related to the body of Christ (Salcedo, 2026). Ephesians is more formal and majestic (Standhartinger, 2025), while Philippians is warmer and more personal. While Ephesians emphasises the cosmic scope of Christ's work, Philippians focuses on the personal implications of Christ's life and teachings. The key similarities between the two letters are that both are deeply Christ-centred, emphasising Christ's work and teachings, highlighting the importance of unity within the church,

and encouraging believers to grow in their faith and live it out in practical ways (Melick Jr, 2026).

Philippians is multifaceted, emphasising the importance of unity in diversity among believers from multicultural backgrounds and highlighting that their shared faith in Christ transcends cultural differences. It encourages believers to adopt a humble, servant-like attitude, mirroring Jesus' example; fosters harmony and understanding in cross-cultural relationships; highlights the essentiality of gratitude and joy in the face of adversity; and demonstrates that attitudes can bridge cultural gaps and strengthen relationships. Furthermore, this letter provides an accurate interpretation as it was written to a predominantly Gentile church in Philippi, and the themes and messages reflect the cultural and historical context.

Philippians uses language and imagery that resonate with both Jewish and Gentile audiences. It emphasises the necessity of building and maintaining relationships across cultural boundaries, highlighting the role of empathy, compassion, and understanding in fostering unity. This letter encourages believers to rejoice and appreciate cultural differences. Recognising these differences enriches the church and enhances greater understanding. It promotes active listening and compassion in cross-cultural relationships, encouraging believers to pursue understanding and avoid

misunderstandings. Also, Philippians emphasises the importance of humility and flexibility in cross-cultural communication, urging believers to be adaptable and open to learning from others.

Ephesians presents difficulties through complex sentences, theological vocabulary, metaphors, and cultural concepts. Philippians presents difficulties through figurative language, emotional expressions, Roman cultural references, and theological concepts. Semantic information gained: simplified English makes difficult ideas, vocabulary, and relationships clearer for ELF users. Semantic information lost: simplification may reduce theological depth, metaphorical meaning, and the richness of the original Greek. Cultural information gained or lost: explanations can help ELF users understand concepts such as Roman citizenship, honour, servanthood, and Jewish-Greco-Roman culture, but may also remove the cultural associations contained in the original expressions.

The preceding discussions show that ELF people might be challenged when interpreting Paul's epistles due to unfamiliar vocabulary, idiomatic expressions, cultural references, historical contexts, and complex theological concepts. This supports evidence-based recommendations such as collaborative interpretation, contextual awareness, accessible translations and commentaries, and the

use of simple language to reduce linguistic and cultural misunderstandings. Also, it explains complex concepts through examples and illustrations and focuses on the main themes of each epistle. However, the use of stories, everyday-life examples, and other teaching techniques should be presented as general pedagogical suggestions rather than direct findings of the study. Thus, the recommendations should clearly demonstrate the link between each identified difficulty and the proposed response.

Methods

The study adopted a qualitative study design to investigate how English as an ELF facilitates the explanation and understanding of selected Pauline epistles. The study was grounded in Canale and Swain's (1980) communicative competence framework, which emphasises grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic dimensions of communication. The population consists of 63 church members from different local churches. From this population, 16 participants were purposively selected. Purposive sampling was appropriate because participants were selected based on their experience with Bible study, Christian teaching, preaching, or interpreting/explaining biblical texts in English.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with the 16 participants. Questions should focus on

their experiences of using English to explain selected passages from Paul's epistles, particularly Ephesians and Philippians, and on the linguistic and cultural difficulties they encounter. The interview responses were analysed thematically. Recurring themes included clarity of explanation, vocabulary and grammar, cultural references, idiomatic expressions, contextual understanding, and communication strategies. The findings were interpreted using Canale and Swain's (1980) four dimensions of communicative competence.

Using thematic analysis, the researchers familiarised themselves with the data; they read the interview responses several times to become familiar with the participants' views and identify initial ideas. The researchers generated initial codes by identifying and labelling important words, phrases, or statements that relate to the study questions. Furthermore, the researchers searched for the codes by grouping related codes to form broader patterns or potential themes. They reviewed the themes by checking whether they accurately represent the coded data and the overall interview responses and defined and named the identified themes by clearly describing what each theme means and giving it an appropriate name. The researchers reported the findings by presenting the themes supported by relevant participant responses and interpreted them in relation to the study objectives and Canale and Swain's

(1980) communicative competence framework.

Findings

The findings of this study were presented under the following four themes corresponding to communicative competence:

Theme 1: Grammatical competence

Participants indicated that English provides a common linguistic medium for explaining Paul's epistles. However, some biblical vocabulary, complex sentence structures, and theological terminology created difficulties for participants whose first languages are not English.

Theme 2: Sociolinguistic competence

Participants recognised that Paul's epistles contain cultural and social meanings associated with the ancient Mediterranean world. They indicated that simply translating the words into English does not always communicate the intended cultural meaning. Additional explanation and contextualisation are therefore necessary.

Theme3: Discourse competence

Participants reported that English enables them to connect ideas across passages and explain Paul's arguments systematically. For example, concepts concerning faith, unity, Christian conduct, suffering, love, and relationships within the Christian

community can be explained through connected English discourse.

Theme 4: Strategic competence

Participants identified the need to use strategies such as paraphrasing, simplifying difficult vocabulary, giving examples, explaining cultural references, repeating important ideas, and using alternative expressions when explaining difficult passages. These strategies helped the researchers overcome linguistic and cultural communication barriers.

Discussion

The findings suggest that English as a Lingua Franca can play an important role in facilitating communication about Paul's epistles among speakers from different linguistic backgrounds. Its usefulness is particularly evident when members of different local churches do not share a common first language but have English as a common additional language. From the perspective of Canale and Swain's (1980) communicative competence framework, effective explanation requires more than grammatical accuracy. A person may understand the English words in Ephesians or Philippians but still misunderstand the intended meaning if the social, cultural, and contextual dimensions are not adequately explained.

The findings therefore indicate that ELF can facilitate access to Pauline teachings, but its effectiveness depends on the communicator's ability to use

appropriate grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competencies. This is particularly important when explaining culturally specific concepts, metaphors, idioms, theological terminology, and references from the first-century context. Overall, the study does not suggest that English should replace local African languages in biblical interpretation but rather be interpreted as showing that English functions as a shared communicative resource through which people from different linguistic backgrounds can access and discuss Paul's epistles, if explanations are adapted to the linguistic and cultural needs of the audience.

Furthermore, Ephesians presents difficulties through complex sentences, theological vocabulary, metaphors, and cultural concepts. Philippians presents difficulties through figurative language, emotional expressions, Roman cultural references, and theological concepts. Semantic information gained: simplified English makes difficult ideas, vocabulary, and relationships clearer for ELF users. Semantic information lost: simplification may reduce theological depth, metaphorical meaning, and the richness of the original Greek. Cultural information gained/lost: explanations can help ELF users understand concepts such as Roman citizenship, honour, servanthood, and Jewish-Greco-Roman culture, but may also remove the cultural associations contained in the original expressions.

The findings justify the recommendations because they show that ELF users may have difficulty interpreting Paul's epistles due to unfamiliar vocabulary, idiomatic expressions, cultural references, historical contexts, and complex theological concepts. These findings support evidence-based recommendations such as collaborative interpretation, contextual awareness, accessible translations and commentaries, and the use of simple language to reduce linguistic and cultural misunderstandings. The findings also support explaining complex concepts through examples and illustrations and focusing on the main themes of each epistle. However, the use of stories, everyday-life examples, and other teaching techniques should be presented as general pedagogical suggestions rather than direct findings of the study. Thus, the recommendations should clearly demonstrate the link between each identified difficulty and the proposed response.

The limitations of this study included a small sample size since only 16 participants were examined out of a population of 267. Although purposive sampling is appropriate for a qualitative study, the small sample limits the extent to which the findings can represent all church members. As regards the limited geographical coverage, the churches included may not have represented all churches or Christian communities in the wider region. The study deliberately

selected churches based on availability and approachability rather than randomly. Selection bias might have existed because the findings could not be statistically generalised to the entire population. Language proficiency differences might have posed some challenges because the ability to explain or understand Pauline epistles in English could have varied. The complexity of biblical texts, including historical, cultural, theological, metaphorical and idiomatic expressions, might have posed difficulties in understanding rather than ELF. Although Canale and Swain's communicative competence framework provided a useful basis for examining communication, it might not have specifically addressed all the issues involved in explaining Paul's writings.

This study's limitations are that ELF can facilitate the explanation and understanding of Paul's epistles among Christians from diverse linguistic backgrounds when communicative competence is effectively applied. It also suggests that Bible teachers and church leaders should combine clear English explanations with cultural contextualisation, paraphrasing, and appropriate communication strategies to reduce misunderstanding of biblical meanings.

The study recommends that church leaders and Bible teachers use clear, accessible English when explaining Paul's epistles to audiences from

different linguistic backgrounds. Biblical explanations should include relevant historical, cultural, and social contexts to help learners understand meanings that may not be immediately clear in English. Teachers and preachers should use paraphrasing, examples, repetition, and simplified vocabulary when explaining difficult biblical concepts. English should be

complemented by local and indigenous languages where necessary when cultural or theological meanings are difficult to communicate effectively in English. Bible teachers should receive training in grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competence that aligns with Canale and Swain's framework.

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