

# Bible Literacy for the Formation of Papuan Rural Servants of God at the Indonesia Cross-Cultural Institute

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## Abstract

The indigenous population of Papua consists of various tribes, cultures, and languages, and they inhabit the coast, riverbanks, valleys and mountains, with the majority adhering to Christianity. As Christians, most Papuans believe in the Bible as their source of teaching and guidance. Unfortunately, until now, the Papuan people have experienced various limitations in teaching the Holy Bible. Tribal languages are one of the causes of the obstacles in question, so it is related to teaching and faith formation in several places that use local languages. This encourages local people called to the ministry to equip themselves with Bible knowledge and skills that will hopefully enable them to develop themselves to serve the people in the area in question. Researchers conducted a study of students at the *Indonesia Cross-Cultural Institute*. They found that literacy became the main obstacle for local missionaries in the interior of Papua in interpreting the contents of the Bible. The process of fostering students at *Indonesia Cross-Cultural Institute* includes three essential things: the *Stage of Knowledge of God*, the *Stage of Character Building*, and the *Stage of Knowledge and Skills*. The method used in writing this article is qualitative research conducted through interviews and literature studies. Finally, this article proposes steps churches and education providers can take for prospective church service workers in Papua.

**Keywords:** Literacy, Bible, Construction, Interior, Papua.

## A. INTRODUCTION

On February 5, 1855, two missionaries arrived on the island of Mansinam, Papua, then known as New Guinea. These missionaries came to preach the gospel to the people in Papua through the evangelistic activities of the two missionaries, namely Ottow and Geissler. They both arrived at the island of Mansinam. They actively brought the gospel message of Christ to the people on the island of Biak and continued to spread to the bay of Cendrawasih to the area of Bird's Head and Fakfak in the southern part of Papua. The gospel preaching continued to the Sarmi area on the north coast of Papua and then to Jayapura.

In southern Papua, missionary service was recorded in the Marind community. The missionary imprint in the Marind Anim community, as found in the research results, is based on the fact and very positive experience that missionaries brought change to the Marind people who initially believed in Dema or Sigo and other supernatural powers and now believe in God (Belang, 2023). Next was the gospel spread by missionaries from America and Australia in the 1930s. This was the period after European missionaries in 1885, and the evangelistic activities of American and Australian missionaries led to the interior of Papua.

The CMA Evangelistic Organization was involved in ministry in the Paniai area, later becoming the forerunner of establishing the Tabernacle Church in Papua. Kristin Rejang writes that Jaffray offered two of their missionaries, Walter Post and Russell Deibler, to which Rejang asserts that: "With the guidance of the Lord, these two servants of the Lord set foot in Uta following the Yawei Estuary and arrived in Enarotali on January 13, 1939, where the Me people were located, and there was used as a service centre for the CMA for the island of Papua. The history of the Baptist Church in Tanah Papua began on October 26, 1956, when the group arrived in Maki and spent the night on the banks of the Maki River. Then, in the morning, he left for Pit River (Prime) and overnight there until October 27, 1956. On October 28, 1956, at noon, I arrived in Tiom and began measuring the construction site of the airfield. Baptists set this date as the day of the first entry of the gospel in the North Baliem region (<https://baptispapua.org/>).

The GIDI Church (Evangelical Church in Indonesia) was first pioneered by three people from the UFM and APCM Mission Board, namely Hans Veldhuis, Fred Dawson, and Russel Bond, in January 1955. Then, in March 1955, Bert Power and Ross Bertell arrived in Bokondini. In addition to the UFM mission, Gesswein, Widbin, and other ABMS missions left Archbold Evangelical Camp on April 28 and came to Bokondini on May 1, 1955. They opened the first airfield on June 5, 1965, and Pilot Dave Steiger landed the first aircraft at Bokondini. Since then, I have officially opened UFM and APCM service posts in Bokondini as an evangelistic base throughout the central mountains of Papua. Tribes in the interior of Papua who have been evangelised since the early 1930s continue to be approached and convey the gospel message with various approaches. Then, those who have believed in Jesus Christ are taught different things. The teaching of the Bible became the main thing then, followed by farming, raising livestock, and building houses.

The first challenge faced by the missionaries since their arrival came from the surrounding tribes who disagreed, and several missionaries were killed. This did not cause any setbacks for the missionaries in fulfilling their call to save the tribes in the interior of Papua. The following problems came from the occupation of the Japanese army during World War 2. The Japanese who fought the Allies came to Papua and met with missionaries from Europe, America and Australia; the missionaries received the impact of the 2nd world War; they left the service to avoid the ferocity of the Japanese army. F. J. S. Romainum, in *Ten Years of GKI after the Hundred Years of Zending in West Irian*, stated that the Japanese military who acted sadistic had caused many congregational teachers and evangelists to leave their jobs, and this had an impact on the preaching of the gospel and the development of Christianity in Papua (Romainum, 1966).

In 1980, some missionaries had to return to their countries due to regulations issued by the Indonesian government. With the issuance of this decree, some missions had to return to their countries because they were sent to preach the gospel and work under the mission agency that sent them, not to join a particular church.

## **B. METHOD**

The author tries to get sources that support this writing, both from literature and conducting interviews. This writing uses qualitative methods. Qualitative research approaches emphasise understanding the subjective meaning of people's experiences. This method uses qualitative data, that is, data collected in the form of words, images, or videos (Creswell, 2019).

This research was conducted at the Indonesia Cross-Cultural Institute, Polomo, Sentani, Jayapura district, Papua Province. This research was born in a social group of which one of the researchers was a member. He has social ties with several people. This relationship with several local communities became the basis for identifying and recruiting students. Overall, the study adopts a qualitative research approach to explore in detail and generate rich data on various literacy practices inside and outside schools. The authors used three months to conduct this study (August 14, 2023-October 30, 2023).

## **C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **1. Basic Literacy**

Literacy is an integral part of primary education. Every educator must strive to help students master basic literacy. In the 21st century, students' literacy ability is closely related to the demands of reading skills, which lead to the ability to understand information analytically, critically and reflectively. However, learning in schools today has yet to be able to realise this (Sari, 2018). The fundamental thing in literacy practice is reading. Reading skills are the foundation for understanding many other things. This ability is essential for the intellectual growth of learners. Through reading, students can absorb knowledge and explore the world that is beneficial to their lives (Wandasari, 2017). Education in the Land of Papua is challenging to develop because of various things that make literacy expensive and impossible to reach. In the interior areas of Papua, regional language schools are the destination for education, even in limited or not comparable numbers to the educational needs in the village. This condition makes it difficult for Papuan students to get the education that students in other regions do. The conditions for Papuan students sent to attend education outside Papua prove this. Students seem unable to follow the lessons, while these students have just left Papua and are adapting to a new environment, coupled with literacy problems. Finally, students face problems due to language difficulties, as well as educators who teach students. Based on an interview with one of the students, the difficulties that students faced were caused by language differences. The language commonly used by Papuan students is the regional language, not Indonesian. Teachers in Papua also carry out the habit of using regional languages in elementary and junior high schools (Putri & Amalia, 2019).

Papua experiences much lagging not because of complex economic and transportation problems. Still, the main factor in education is the need for more basic literacy in the Land of Papua. Hence, education in any field of science becomes difficult for Papuan students.

## **2. Bible Literacy**

The Bible is a book that looks the same as other books in general, but the content contained in the Bible is very different from the books written by many people in this world. By reading the Bible, a person will gain teachings that will help him live in this world. Not just a book, the Bible is the truth that God tells man; the Bible is the guide to human life. Lois wrote: "We evangelicals agree wholeheartedly on the Bible's place in teaching, but we think little about the use of the Bible" (Lebar, 2006).

In reading the Bible, we must understand its meaning, and the meaning of studying it must be used correctly. The literacy contained in the Bible requires an introduction to history, language, cultural background and so on. The Bible itself uses very vivid symbols to describe how it is used. He spoke of himself as:

The seed to bear fruit – Luke 8:11

Rain and snow to refresh – Isaiah 55:10-11

Food to eat – Jeremiah 15:16

Milk and meat – Hebrews 5:12-14

Honey and gold – Psalm 19:10

Pelita to illuminate – Psalm 119:105

Mirror to mirror – James 1:22-24

Washing water reservoir for cleaning – Psalm 119:9

A sword to pierce, capable of discernment – Hebrews 4:12

Fire to burn, hammer to break – Jeremiah 23:29 (Lebar, 2006).

A person's limitations in using Indonesian as a language used in formal education and communicating in general with people from other tribes become an obstacle to getting a good education and coaching and also become an obstacle to conveying the news of safety to people who come from outside the village or from outside the Land of Papua.

## **3. The Development of Christianity in the Interior of Papua**

Missionaries come to serve in Papua; they hand over responsibilities service to the regional prince. The first generation to receive the gospel from missionaries was able to continue the gospel message to various places in the interior of Papua. When a chief repents, his whole tribe will give himself up to baptise with his chief. According to Agus, a student from the Yahukimo district of Central Papua Province: "The church leaders come from regional language schools, now children in the village are more likely not to go to church" (Ousa, 2023). Kipen said: "Our church leaders speak only regional languages, and pastors are more likely to listen to people than to practice the truth of God's Word" (Kogoya, 2023). This has caused some ministers from rural areas to desire to go to schools that can help them have good Bible knowledge so that they can help people or church members live righteously according to Bible teachings. Literacy is a complicated problem and needs to be solved. The involvement of various parties is required to resolve this issue. To overcome difficulties in this remote area, it is hoped that the assistance and participation of all teachers in the field of study and educators who are called to this educational task. One of them is a Catholic education

teacher. These teachers are regarded as illiterate hacking agents in remote areas because the majority of the population in the interior of Papua is Christian and Catholic (Mawene, 2018).

The research shows the importance of language learning and literacy for developing literacy among God's servants and indigenous people in the interior of Papua. By reading the Bible, students gain teachings and truths of God's Word that must be applied in daily life. The difficulty that arises is that not all words in the Bible are understood by students or ministers from the interior of Papua who are accustomed to using the regional language. Most rural ministers still need to catch up regarding education and literacy. The author finds the problems faced by servants of God from the interior of Papua; this is what motivates the author to conduct this research as an effort to contribute to the knowledge gap that causes servants and people to experience a Christian life that is not by the truth of God's Word because they do not understand what is written in the Bible.

#### **4. The Construction of God's Servant**

Indonesia Cross-Cultural Institute (ICCI) was started in 2017 and produced servants of God who have served both in Papua and outside Papua. ICCI, as an educational institution and the formation of God's servants in Papua, is under the auspices of the Global Mission International Indonesia Foundation (GMII). Initially, education and coaching were conducted in Bandung, West Java Province. Still, since the COVID-19 pandemic problem, ICCI education and coaching activities were moved to Sentani, Jayapura district, Papua Province. ICCI provides theological education and character building and equips its students with various skills expected to make them servants of God who have proper knowledge of God's Word, have a loving Christian character, are skilled entrepreneurs, and are a blessing to others. Education at ICCI lasts nine months, divided into three stages: 1. Bible Literacy (Introduction to Literacy); 2. Character building (Literacy Comprehension); 3. Skills (Literacy Practice). **First Stage: Biblical Literacy (Introduction to Literacy)**

This literacy discusses how man was created, man's relationship with God at the beginning of creation, and the breakdown of man's relationship with God that required man to experience rebirth. In this stage, students are first allowed to answer the question: have you been born again? The answers show that students need help understanding what it means to be born again. In these first three months, the teaching pressure focuses on how students should have a relationship with God, in this case, experiencing the new birth. The emphasis on the importance of the new birth is explained using suitable examples from the tracts "Four Spiritual Laws", "Peace with God", "The Way of Salvation," and also from several Bible verses that describe the new birth.

Man's fall into sin greatly affected people's lives. Man cannot communicate with God because the human spirit experiences spiritual death. John 4:24 says: God is Spirit, and whoever worships Him must worship Him in spirit and truth. When humans eat fruit in the middle of the garden, it is said that humans will die. The Bible



records that after Adam and Eve ate the fruit in the garden, they did not die. Their bodies remained alive, but their spirits died. The spirits of Adam and Eve, which were an essential part of man's relationship with God, died as a result of man's transgression or disobedience to what God commanded. Man was cast out of the Garden of Eden; man lived on earth in sin. Whatever man cannot bring man to have a relationship with God? For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 3:23). Regarding rebirth, Paul Enns writes that rebirth is a process that begins from above, namely from God through the Holy Spirit, so that the believer experiences new life when he receives the God of Jesus personally in his life. In sharing a new life, he was given the ability to live righteously (2 Corinthians 5:17), a fresh mind to know God and a new will to obey God (Paul Enns, 2016). Sproul states that "Regeneration is a new beginning. It is more than leaves that spring back after autumn and winter. It marks a new life within a person that has been radically renewed. The new birth is the work of the Holy Spirit on those who are spiritually dead (Sproul, 1997). It is essential to emphasise the new birth because this is the foundation or basis on which ICCI students can progress to learn the truth found in God's Word. As a result of the emphasis on new birth, students feel a change in their lives. Manuel, an ICCI student who had previously completed his education at one of the Theological Colleges in Jayapura, said: "I think I already know many things about Christianity, but this kind of lesson was never taught to us in theological school. I thank the Lord for this lesson about the new birth (Manuel, 2023). A female student from the Lani tribe is terrified because she feels someone constantly disturbing her in her sleep. He told me that he saw a man in black clothes coming to attack him, but then he cast him out in the name of Jesus. The student, Octofina, had learned to accept and trust Jesus (Octofina, 2023). Korneles, a student from the Kimyal tribe in the Yahukimo area, said: "After I understood and accepted Jesus in my life, there was a change that I felt; now I believe and accept Jesus in my life, there is a change that I think. Now that I acknowledge that I have experienced a new birth, I must take care of my life to please Jesus, who has lived in my life. When I go home, I will try to make the people in my village experience a new birth (Korneles, 2023).

### **Second Stage: Understanding Literacy (Character Building)**

Students are directed to obey the truth of God's Word at this stage. The foundation has been prepared for the first three months, and it is hoped that with this stage, students will experience spiritual growth, especially character building, as people who have experienced a new birth. Asih wrote: "Thus, a minister who is righteous in serving must begin his life and ministry from rebirth or rebirth" (Rachmani, 2019). ICCI students learn to know themselves and God who works in them looking at one's neighbour as Jesus saw man, loving man as the Lord Jesus taught. This is important to teach because of the general condition of the Papuan people, who experience much pressure in life. Hence, it is difficult to develop to escape life's pressures. As a Papuan who finds it challenging to gain self-acceptance, appreciation and love of Jesus that touches the heart and results in a new birth, it will change the view of Papuans to see others not as before they knew Jesus and

experienced the new birth. Political, economic and other problems that developed in Papua closed Papuans' ability to accept other people or people who come to Papua, even though there are still many Papuans who have not been able to get or appreciate Papuans who come from different tribes/regions in Papua.

Life in dormitories requires everyone to respect each other, which also happens in ICCI dormitories. Students come from various regions/tribes in Papua. Rebirth has been taught, and every student who has experienced a new birth must experience spiritual growth. These are challenging times ahead, but teachers always try to motivate that God in Jesus Christ asks every believer to live by the truth of God's Word. To claim to be a Christian but to live incompatible with the gospel of Christ is the opposite. Man has free will, whether to follow the truth taught in the Bible or live according to his desires.

Loris, a student from Mamberamo, wants to refrain from participating in activities that may feel heavy; he prefers to get out of the dormitory and visit family. Every weekend, when other friends garden, raise livestock or do other activities according to the school program that aims to build the student's character, these students choose different things. He quietly left the dormitory without telling the teacher or the student leader. This student eventually had to be expelled from education because he had violated too much and did not heed the reprimand. Unlike Loris, a student named Rina comes from the Lani tribe but lives in the Taja Lereh area, having problems with her roommate Irma, who comes from the Tanah Merah tribe from Jayapura Regency. Rina's anger makes her emotional because Irma's words about Rina are untrue. Rina felt slandered; she was furious as hell. Rina said: "If I were still the me I used to be, I would have beaten Irma now. Praise God, now I am in the Lord Jesus, and I forgive Irma". Thankfully, now that I've changed, I can contain my emotions." I have never received this lesson before; I am very grateful to God for the lesson at ICCI because it opened my horizons to know the creation of man and why man fell into sin, so it is said that man sins", likewise with another student named Wali. He explained how morning devotions helped him enrich his vocabulary and speak well, making it easier for him to receive lessons. Wali said, for example, that morning devotions helped me improve at reading and meditating on the Bible. The more often I deliver devotionals, the more I acquire new vocabulary. If I master the language well, I can answer the questions correctly, and it helps me get good grades.

### **Third Stage: Literacy Practice (Skills)**

A foreign teacher teaches Torah lessons to students. He was impressed by the questions submitted by the students, which he found very weighty. Likewise, the answer the students gave when David asked the question from Genesis, the students' answer greatly satisfied him. It is because the students have gone through difficult times to know themselves and know their Savior. They have changed lives and are well prepared to receive teaching because Jesus has mastered their hearts.

Literacy practices are carried out inside and outside the classroom. In class, students are tasked with reading and explaining Bible verses. This task is given to build the students' confidence, and they are used to public speaking. At this stage, the

students also practice literacy outside the classroom with various skills: Cooking, baking, sewing, raising livestock, and gardening. During these three months, the students were on duty in the kitchen and dining hall. They determine the food to be cooked, shop at the market, cook food for everyone in the hostel, and prepare and serve it. When they first enter the kitchen, there are many obstacles experienced by students. Moreover, this seems to contradict their culture: men in the kitchen and cooking. A change in life as the basis of becoming genuine Christians keeps them excited about the task. They study different types of seasonings necessary for different types of cuisine. The students were happy to cook after knowing and working in the kitchen. Dibanus said: Thanks to now that I know how to cook and bake, I will start trying to cook at home (Dibanus, 2023).

#### D. CONCLUSION

Literacy is the basis for gaining knowledge. The development of the times affects the development of literacy. Still, conditions in the Land of Papua, which are far inland and hard-to-reach areas, make it more difficult for Papuans to advance in education. The use of regional languages in daily communication makes Papuans who are already open to the gospel not understand God's will or what God teaches in the Bible.

ICCI made a breakthrough that allows Papuans to learn the truth of God's word by first accepting Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior personally, respecting themselves as God's creation and loving their fellow humans as the purpose of God's love. An acceptable curriculum is needed and changes students' lives. So that the 9-month education program at ICCI can benefit oneself and fellow humans. Winning the Land of Papua from the village and hinterland, independence in Christ resulted in a significant change in the lives of the Papuan people.

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