



Volume 1 | May 2025



www.sunrisejournal.world

Literacy Development for Early Education in Papua

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ABSTRACT

Early literacy promotes social inclusion. It fosters a sense of belonging and participation, irrespective of cultural background. However, in contrast, this paper introduces evidence for another correlation, that is between districts in Papua with a high illiteracy rate and those experiencing elevated levels of poverty.

Keywords: Literacy, Early Education

A. INTRODUCTION

According to Pahabol (**Pademme, 2022**), the average illiteracy rate in Papua is as high as 21.9 per cent. This is the highest illiteracy rate in Indonesia. The Indonesian Constitution guarantees that every Indonesian child, without exception, has the right to an education. In fact, Child Protection Law Article 48 mandates that the government must provide nine years of education for every child. Our question is, if Papuan children do not have the same opportunity as other Indonesian children and poverty correlates to illiteracy, practically, what is to be done to address this situation.

Table 1. Literacy rate and illiteracy rate (BPS, 2020 aged 15-44) by Districts in Papua.

No	Districts/Regencies	Literacy Rate	Illiteracy Rate
1	Jayawijaya	73,03	26,97
2	Paniai	64,47	35,53
3	Tolikara	63, 66	36, 34
4	Intan Jaya	60,57	39,43
5	Puncak Jaya	59,96	40.04
6	Mamberamo Tengah	58,67	41.33
7	Deyai	56,23	43,77

8	Dogiyai	51,00	49.00
9	Nduga	46,45	53,55
10	Lanny Jaya	35,34	64,66

Significantly, Papua occupies the highest ranking in terms of poverty compared to other provinces in Indonesia (BPS, 2022). In fact, Papua Province has the highest number of underdeveloped areas in Indonesia. When comparing this data with Table 1. a clear statistical correlation between illiteracy and poverty in Papua can be observed. Such underprivileged districts require assistance from the government, the private sector, traditional leaders, religious leaders, and educators, in cooperation with the entire community including parents, that is if Indonesia is to build a collective movement to improve literacy and in turn reduce poverty in Papua.

B. DISCUSSION AND RECOMENDATIONS

What then is the answer? This paper proposes the development of a culturally relevant and age-appropriate literacy curriculum as essential first steps to address illiteracy in Papua and in turn reducing illiteracy-related poverty. Such a curriculum must consider specific local requirements, languages, and cultures. To support its implementation, funding and resources are required, for example, to cover the cost of books, other educational materials, teaching facilities and infrastructure, including the implementation of digital technologies. Moreover, investment in training programs must include professional development for teachers and educators focussing on evidence-based teaching methods that promote literacy and early childhood development as well as promote life opportunities.

This requires patience, commitment, and the involvement of the entire community. It also means regular arm's length assessments of the program's impact so that strategies may be adapted to achieve long-term improvements in early education. Importantly, this also involves engaging the entire community in the education process by conducting workshops and awareness programs. The parents' roles in underprivileged areas has a significant influence on literacy development. Literacy education, for example, can be commenced from early childhood with the regular reading of story books to children at home (Septiani & Kurniawati, 2021).

Adapting literacy programs to the specific needs and the cultural context of children in Papua is crucial for their success in life. Creating a text-rich classroom environment can motivate teachers to make children aware of the goals of reading and writing. Printed material in the child's surroundings, such as advertising material can also be connected to the child's lessons at school. The advantage of a child's knowledge of words in their surroundings is that teachers can then begin to teach letters and sounds.

In developing a successful classroom environment, the setting should provide opportunities for language growth similar to what is found in the home environment (Holdaway, 1979 cited in Chandrawaty, 2016). Some guidelines based on this concept are as follows: 1) Provide a variety of resources for both reading and purposeful writing; 2) Place labels with key words around the room at children's eye level; 3) Arrange the room so that children can participate in classroom activities and take ownership of the space; 4) Display students' work so that they can see and discuss it with their peers (boards and bulletin boards should also be at the child's eye level); 5) Use reading materials that are related to classroom activities. Moreover, teachers who provide students with integrated learning in a literate environment can enhance learning outcomes because children use interconnected processes of reading, writing, speaking, and listening to formulate authentic communication.

A print-rich environment will encourage Papuan children to experiment with literacy. Children read and write as a novel way to communicate. This is different from spoken language. They observe the print environment and 'play' with reading and writing. In this way, they feel literacy is a natural part of their development. Further, teachers can support students to discover literacy skills within a meaningful context (Graves, 2010 cited in Chandrawaty, 2016). According to Kenneth Goodman (1986 cited in Burns 1996), all of these activities consistently guide children towards reading and writing.

The classroom environment is in fact a determinant of a child's positive development potential, ipso facto, as it relates to success in life measured in this instance by reduction in levels of poverty. In Papua, and elsewhere in Indonesia, home, the community, and the classroom are where this process begins.

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