



The Use of Vernacular Languages in Early Education in Papua as a Bridge to the Indonesian National Educational System

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Abstract: This paper discusses the potential advantages of using vernacular language instruction to address the high dropout rates of indigenous elementary students in Highlands Papua, Indonesia. The effect of challenges created by differences between local culture and the culture presented in the national Indonesian educational system is discussed. David Kolb's Experiential Learning theory is discussed as a method that can improve student outcomes by encouraging early comprehension through linguistically and culturally relevant experiences. Successful bilingual primary education programs in various countries are discussed. Examples are presented that illustrate the importance and advantages of foreigners acknowledging local language and culture while amongst the Papua people. This paper proposes steps that the Indonesian government, especially the local jurisdiction of Papua province's governance, can take to utilize vernacular language to address the achievement gap of indigenous elementary students in Highlands Papua.

Keywords: vernacular language, Highlands Papua, Indigenous Elementary Education.

Abstrak: Makalah ini membahas potensi keuntungan menggunakan pengajaran bahasa daerah untuk mengatasi tingginya angka putus sekolah siswa sekolah dasar di dataran tinggi Papua, Indonesia. Efek dari tantangan yang diciptakan oleh perbedaan antara budaya lokal dan budaya yang disajikan dalam sistem pendidikan nasional Indonesia dibahas. Teori Experiential Learning David Kolb dibahas sebagai metode yang dapat meningkatkan hasil siswa dengan mendorong pemahaman awal melalui pengalaman yang relevan secara linguistik dan budaya. Program pendidikan dasar bilingual yang berhasil di berbagai negara dibahas. Contoh disajikan yang menggambarkan pentingnya dan keuntungan orang asing mengakui bahasa dan budaya lokal sementara di antara orang-orang Papua. Makalah ini mengusulkan langkah-langkah yang dapat diambil pemerintah Indonesia, khususnya yurisdiksi lokal pemerintahan provinsi Papua, untuk memanfaatkan bahasa daerah untuk mengatasi kesenjangan prestasi siswa sekolah dasar di Dataran Papua.

Kata kunci: bahasa daerah, Dataran Tinggi Papua, Pendidikan Dasar Pribumi

Introduction

In his book *Communication Jesus' Way*, Charles Kraft recognizes the importance of “a bridge” that can help to connect two ends in the subject of communication. Kraft (2013, p. 5) states that “a communicational gap always exists between beings who seek to interact with one another, whether we are focusing on the interactions of humans with humans or between God and humans”. Furthermore, Kraft explains the need for a communicational bridge in this situation because there is a large gap between the *source* and the *receptor*. By observing the life of Jesus, Kraft points that as Christian communicators including Christian educators, we need to apply Jesus' example that showed how He approached His listeners and disciples through employing their culture and language. In other words, in His communicational style, Jesus did not exercise heavenly culture and language where He came from. He immersed Himself in the life of the people surrounding Him even with the little children

who loved to meet and listen to Him. Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these,” (Matthew 19:14 NIV).

In light of Jesus’ method of communicating with others, this paper endeavors to illustrate to the possible way to bridge the considerable gap between the Indonesian government system of education and the life of the indigenous people in Highlands Papua, one of the provinces that is located on the Eastern side of Indonesia. The native people of Papua are vastly different from the other ethnic groups within Indonesia. Papuans prefer to identify themselves as Melanesians instead of Indonesians because of their social system, culture and “performative structures” which are different from the Indonesian community at large (Hayward, 2003).

Education in the Highlands of Papua

While the Dutch colonized Indonesia for three and a half centuries, they geared the model of education towards preparing people for administrative positions. However, when Indonesians gained their independence, they immediately began to implement a broader educational model which stressed the importance of character development as well as intellectual pursuits (Kartodirdjo, 1988). Drake points out that Indonesia’s national education, introduced in 1945, following the country independence from Japan and Holland, “...has since served as a vehicle for expanding national consciousness and socializing newcomers to the national ideals,” (Drake, 1989, p. 71).

As a new nation, the Indonesian government attempted to ensure national integration in light of Indonesia’s remarkable diversity as a country comprising more than 13,000 islands, 200 million people and 50 different ethnic groups. Government leaders considered the school system an important mechanism for fostering national integration, thus mandating the use of Bahasa Indonesia as the language of instruction (Bjork, 2005, p. 47). The Indonesian government had until recently enforced a mainly Javanese style of government and educational system and according to the central Indonesian government, Papuans need the assistance of more clever and better-educated citizens from other Indonesian islands, especially they need to “learn from the Javanese,” (‘Transmigration’, 2008). With this kind of obligation, indigenous Papuans have long felt alienated and oppressed in their homeland.

Since the integration of Irian Jaya (now Papua) with Indonesia in 1969, the educational system within public schools in Papua has been required to utilize the standardized and centralized curriculum from the ministry of education and culture based out of Jakarta. “Like all branches of the government, the Ministry of education and Culture (MOEC) was organized vertically, with ultimate authority ensconced at the top of the hierarchy. This is not at all surprising, considering the hierarchical nature of Javanese culture,” (Bjork, 2005, p. 47).

Farhadian (2009) asserts that besides the Indonesian government program of transmigration into Papua as a social engineering technique to make a new society, the educational system was also utilized as a vehicle for the propaganda of the New Order regime of late President Suharto. Farhadian elaborates:

The ideology behind Indonesian developmentalism was tied to the vision of Indonesianness that infused the rhetorical and developmental strategy of the nation. Dani, and other Papuan highland neighbors, became special targets of national ideologies and cultural projects, with the result that they were assigned positions as objects of development. With “unmistakable overtones of paternalism Javanese officials saw themselves on a ‘mission’ to ‘civilize’ backward (masih bodoh) [literally, ‘still stupid’], naked Papuans,” (Farhadian, 2009, p. 26).

Because the main goal of the Indonesian government was to “Indonesianize” Papuans via the educational system, the national school curriculum was entirely designed and printed in Jakarta, the capital city of Indonesia. Unfortunately, those who designed the curriculum have never actually set foot to Papua, or to the Eastern part of Indonesia for that matter. “It is important to understand that the Indonesian approach to education is strappingly affected by the Javanese concept of education as training a child to “become a somebody”, that is, a respected member of society,” (Mulder, 1989, p. 25). Consequently, the national educational curriculum, which focuses on standardization has little room for diversity and pays no attention to the needs and desires of the locals, nor appreciates their cultures and languages. The Indonesian educational curriculum also privileges the Javanese historical perspective while ignoring the history of the peoples of East Kalimantan, South Sulawesi, Sumatra, and most egregiously, West Papua. This situation, which amounts to an erasure of history, can exacerbate feelings of marginalization and shame in the national identity of the West Papuan (Farhadian, 2009, p. 59).

The lack of attention given by the Indonesian government to Papua is evident in the absence of acknowledgement and approval towards the identity and dignity of the Papuan ethnic groups. Presently, evidence of such neglect is still noticeable from the development in Papua, especially in the highland villages, which are severely lagging behind. In his book *Indonesia*, Frost considers West Papua a poor and underdeveloped province of Indonesia in comparison to the rest of the country, in spite of its exceptional wealth of natural resources. Though West Papua is the home of Freeport Indonesia, one of the world’s richest mines, containing enormous reserves of copper and gold, indigenous Papuans have the lowest life expectancy and highest maternal mortality rates in Indonesia (Frost, 2002, p. 69). Even after being under the Indonesian government for more than 25 years, many indigenous inhabitants of Papua especially the highland tribes feel that they have not benefited socio-politically, economically and educationally from the integration with Indonesia.

Despite the efforts and expenditure that the Indonesian government has applied to the development of Papua, the results are often quite the opposite of expectations, both by the central government and by the Papuans themselves. This discrepancy creates a paradox (Timmer & Visser, 2000). Hence, in spite of the developmental goal of assisting Papuans, primarily non-Papuan entrepreneurs and government officials were the ones benefiting from the economic opportunities. A high percentage of government positions were officially allotted to Papuans, however, the educational and training gaps between Papuans and non-Papuans make it difficult to reach this target. Papuans represent only about 15 percent of the province’s civil service in the lower ranks. This lack of admittance into formal employment creates a feeling of increased frustration and despair (Timmer & Visser, 2000, p. 206).

Agus Sumule reports an incident that illustrates the deep disappointment that native Papuans’ feel toward the policy of the Indonesian government. This incident occurred prior to national general election (1997) in Sugapa village, Central Highlands of Papua. Sumule wrote:

Suddenly, hundreds of the Moni natives ran up the hill, approaching the government officers. As they were shouting and screaming, which is the custom of the highlanders of Papua when expressing dissatisfaction; the officers left their work and started to run for their lives. However, the Moni chief called out to Fritz and said “Look Camat, we don’t have anything against you personally. We are just tired of pemilu (general elections).” Raising his arm and counting on his fingers, he continued, “We have participated in pemilu for five times: 1971, 1977, 1982, 1987, and 1992. Now, we will have another pemilu. But we are still wearing penis gourds!”. The Camat (head of sub-district) was speechless. The statement of the Moni chief perfectly illustrates the

irrelevance of general elections to the lives of ordinary Papuans under Suharto's regime. Even though each district in Papua had parliaments, all of them were basically dominated by Golkar representatives, almost all of whom were civilian government and military officers (Sumule, 2002, p. 73).

The conditions described thus far in this paper, raise questions and concerns: What is wrong with the education and development in Papua? Moreover, why has it not been able to bring welfare to the indigenous people? Thus far there are many complaints from both native citizens of Papua (Ajamiseba, 1987; Degei, 2007; Pekey, 2007) and the outsiders (Bjork, 2005; Farhadian, 2009), including the linguistic experts from mission agencies (Cutts, 2009; Ellenberger, 2009; Lake, 2009), regarding the lack of acknowledgment from the Indonesian government in regards to the cultures and languages of native Papuans.

History shows that education is imperative to the development of any nation (Pekey, 2007). Education yields intellectuals with critical minds who will have a role in the development of a nation and country, especially in science and technology. However, what happened in Papua is that educational system was tremendously centralized and as a result failed to provide opportunities for the native Papuans to explore education suited to their local conditions and culture.

According to Degei, the national curriculum implemented in Papua was not created with the reality of local living in mind. Papuans live in villages and work in plantations. However, the education system in place in Papua is not amenable to such a reality. As a matter of fact, what the local society expected was for the educational system to generate benefits that can be applied directly to life's resoluteness, since education, in its core essence, is aimed at enhancing lives (Degei, 2007).

To illustrate the impracticality of the education system in Papua. Degei describes how primary school pupils are required to learn in Indonesian language about train, rig saw, Siti and Budi (typical Javanese names) and about other objects names (within Javanese culture) which do not exist in Papua. Pupils whose minds are in the process of developing cannot directly see within their surroundings the things about which they were learning. All those objects are outside of their lives' reality. The way primary school children think is mechanical, not analytical (Degei, 2007). Developmentally they are in the concrete operational stage of intellectual development and yet unable to think abstractly or hypothetically. Degei thus concludes that the education system implemented in Papua is unrealistic and concerned more with the attainment of a political agenda (Degei, 2007).

In order to bridge the sizeable gap within the education system in Papua, specifically in highland Papua, it would be more fruitful if the Indonesian government pays more attention to the culture and local languages. Human beings are likely to respond positively when teachers, educational content or policies alike appreciate their culture and language.

A concrete example of people appreciating the local culture and languages of Highlands Papua is the experiences of many long-term missionaries who served in Papua. For instance, Hayward, a missionary in Mulia, Highland Papua, for 20 years (1967 – 1987) describes how the Mulia Dani gave "open secret" descriptive names to missionaries but which they also did not use in the presence of the missionaries. Hayward learned upon inquiry that not all the names given to the missionaries in the Mulia area were flattering. Hayward recounts the response of the Mulia Dani when he asked if they were comfortable sharing what they called him:

...Without hesitation, they said: "Yes. Your name is *Ninabuwa* (He loves us), because you are concerned about us and our needs." My first reaction to the name, was mixed, in that I wanted to

think that I was being so positively received, but at the same time concerned that my informant was simply attempting to flatter me. Over next several years though, I was able to confirm from several different sources that this was indeed my Dani name (Hayward, 1997, p. 20).

The approach used by Hayward and the other missionaries was cultural rapprochement. That was the reason those indigenous people in rural Papua accepted and even loved the missionaries. Hayward and his family were willing to live in the midst of Papuan society learning the culture and language from the particular tribe living there. For that reason, it is not surprising that the Mulia Dani people called him *Ninabuwa* (meaning “He loves us”). In contrast to the above situation, what the Indonesian government did instigated resistant from the Papuan. As a case in point, in a bid to introduce the new form of governance, the Indonesian government did not make any effort to prepare their officers to learn and understand the local culture, as described by Hayward. For instance, the first Indonesian government official sent to the Mulia region was a coastal Irianese who did not speak Dani and who therefore had to rely on the missionaries and schoolchildren to translate his communication (Hayward, 1997, p. 92).

After they understood the Papuan society and were accepted by the indigenous people, the missionaries began to establish education through usage of vernacular language. It is true that the ultimate aim in teaching them to read was to enable them read the Bible, however, the by-product of being literate is that they were able to learn another new knowledge as well. Hayward reports that less than a decade after the first arrival of missionaries in Mulia there were widely attended literacy schools in every population center in the Mulia district. For instance, in Wirgele village which Hayward sampled in 1978, “...73% of the adult males (75 out of 103), and 60% of the adult females (69 out of 115) had attended literacy school and had graduated with a certificate of fluency,” (Hayward, 1997, p. 35).

Furthermore, Hayward reported that besides teaching the Dani about Bible stories, the missionaries in Mulia introduced a series of classes for graduates from the literacy schools, primarily aimed at young adults to teach geography and physical science. The focus of these classes was to introduce the Dani to a scientific understanding of the universe, the geographical features of the earth, the names and locations of contemporary political states and the origins and distribution of the races of humankind. The content of these courses was soon taken over by the Indonesian school system, but these early attempts by the missionaries were a precursor to a changing worldview by the Dani about the world in which they live (Hayward, 1997, p. 36).

Warker (1987) further describes the impact of literacy about twenty-five after it was first introduced to the Dani. A Remarkable 40% of the population had learned to read in that period and more than one in ten had their own copy of the New Testament. There was a continuing desire for more literature (e.g., the Old Testament, etc.) in the vernacular language as well as ongoing vernacular language classes in the most Western Dani villages. “Literacy in the vernacular language has become an indigenous institution and a part of the Dani way of life,” (Ting-Toomey, 2005, p. 24). The reason why the Dani in Mulia were interested in learning to read was that they learned to read and interact in their vernacular language. The missionaries formulated the content of this literacy class with a much attention to the local cultural context and it thus produced a concrete benefit to every person who took the class. Moreover, according to Hayward, as an evidence, this program used a variation of the Laubauch principle of “each one teach one” so that outstanding graduates from the first literacy classes were quickly turned into teachers themselves (Hayward, 1997, p. 35).

The Advantages of Utilizing Vernacular Language in Primary Schools

Unlike literacy classes conducted by missionaries, the public schools run by the Indonesian government educational system do not utilize vernacular language. Every public school is obligated to use Indonesian language as its instructional communication. Ajamiseba concludes that the language barrier between teachers and students is one of the major problems of the educational system in Papua. First-generation primary school pupils from remote villages often come to school with little to no knowledge of Indonesian and could sometimes spend years completing the first grade because they are simply unable to communicate with the teacher and therefore first have to figure out what the teacher is saying. Compared to other provinces in Indonesia, West Papua had the highest student's dropout rate in national educational system (Ajamiseba, 1987, p. 5). Therefore, Ajamiseba proposed to Indonesian government the use of vernacular language to help and motivate the indigenous Papuan children to participate in public schools. He asserted that if teachers first taught the pupils to read and write in their mother tongue, they would read from the start about things meaningful to them in their everyday life – words, simple phrases and sentence that they used, for example, when watching the baby while their mother went to the garden or to the river. “Consequently, the teacher would then be able to work towards reading for comprehension from the very first lessons; this way the concept of reading is quickly established,” (Ajamiseba, 1987, p. 6).

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) emphasizes the importance of vernacular language usage in education for children. Larson utilized the report from UNESCO for his argument regarding the significance of employing vernacular language for children education (Larson, 1981; UNESCO, 2008). Larson points out that educationists and Psychologists alike agree that a child should where possible, first learn to read and write in the language spoken at home, the language of the child's first verbal communication with parents and siblings. When this foundation has been laid he can acquire a full command of his own and, if necessary, of other languages; without it, there is danger that he will never achieve a thorough command of any language. (Larson, 1981, p. 15)

A 2008 report from UNESCO Bangkok, Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education, reviews case studies from Asia, Africa and South America (19 countries) on the subject of utilizing vernacular language in their educational system. These case studies demonstrate that the use of vernacular language could help the learners to learn faster, actively participate in literacy classes, and help to reduce dropout rates from formal school. News and reports from three regions of the world indicated that the use of learners' languages for teaching and learning is not only preferable; it is feasible and easily attainable. (UNESCO, 2008, p. i)

Literacy Program in Cibago Community, West Java, Indonesia

One of the pilot projects pioneered by UNESCO took place in Indonesia. The title of the project was “Mother tongue literacy integrated with community development.” Interestingly, this pilot project was neither in Papua, nor other remote places on some other islands, but in Cibago Village, Subang District, West Java province, not far from the Indonesia capital city Jakarta. The Cibago community (645 people) speaks Sundanese to communicate and interact with one another in their daily lives. From 109 participants, 54 primary school aged kids participated in the pilot project. The three phases of the project were as follows:

1. Phase 1: reading, writing, arithmetic, discussion and action based on mother tongue usage and development.

2. Phase 2: a balance between mother tongue and Indonesian language by using material applied to daily life.
3. Phase 3: Indonesian language strengthened, because learners are more advanced and working towards being independent. (UNESCO, 2008, p. 62).

Prior to the pilot project launch, the Cibago community was mostly illiterate. Most of the 21 learners in the original pilot program had dropped out of elementary school between grades 1 and 4 and were illiterate. As they participated in this UNESCO program, they could apply reading, writing and arithmetic abilities to their daily lives. For instance, they were "... able to read newspapers, filling in forms, calculating household expenditures, calculating capital, benefit and loss of a business, and so on." (UNESCO, 2008, p. 64). The outcome of this pilot project was remarkable. It has great positive impact in many ways, such as education conditions, program effectiveness, Indonesian language learning, quality of life, and participation in the learning process (UNESCO, 2008, p. 65).

The strength from this pilot project was not only from employing vernacular language but also from the implementation of experiential learning education. The experiential learning utilized in this pilot project was similar to David Kolb's experiential learning theory. According to Kolb, effective learners need to be able to interact with their environment through all four different adaptive learning modes, namely, concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. Therefore, learning experiences can be designed and or evaluated using each of these four learning modes (Kolb, 1983). In addition, Kolb believes that in experiential learning theory, the interaction relationship between the person and the environment is symbolized in the dual meanings of the term experience – one subjective and personal, referring to the person's internal state, as in "the experience of joy and happiness," and the other objective and the other objective and environmental (Kolb, 1983, p. 35).

There were three learning patterns employed in the Cibago Community pilot project that parallel David Kolb's theory. The first learning pattern stipulated that the learning activities should be based on an exploration of learners' experience such as cultural practice and values as well as on their desired skills. Secondly, the learning topics are decided in advance, but always are associated with learners' experiences in culture/art, economic activities, health, nature and the environment. The last pattern has three learning levels. The first is strengthening the local language (mother tongue) which is associated with cultural values, traditions and practices of both individuals and groups. The second is learning skills appropriate to the interests and needs of the learners. The final third is learning of Indonesian as a second language (Kolb, 1983, p. 61).

Literacy Program in Peruvian Amazonia, South America

Besides the above UNESCO report, the advantage of utilizing vernacular language had also been demonstrated in Peruvian Amazonia, South America. In 1952, the Peruvian government, in collaboration with SIL (sister organization to Wycliffe Bible Translators) began plans for experimental bilingual school program for the indigenous peoples in the jungle. Larson observes that utilizing vernacular language in the first years of primary school facilitates the students to comprehend the lessons and to learn the prestige language (Spanish) as their second language (Larson, 1981). Larson's further hypothesis is as follows:

In beginners reading, the process is more of an association between written symbols and oral symbols. If children are familiar with the spoken form, then reading becomes a process of

learning the symbols for the spoken forms which are meaningful to them. If reading is taught in a foreign language, children are no longer making this simple association. Since the spoken form has no meaning for them, they must also try to attach meaning to both the written and the spoken form. Otherwise, they merely become parrots, associating the oral form with the written form but with no meaning or content for either form. Learning to read a foreign language may become nonsense to children because the spoken form related to the symbols has no meanings. (Larson, 1981, p. 19).

Furthermore, according to Larson, the usage of vernacular language in the foundation of child education also provides a positive impact on parent-children relationship because the parents would also be involved and that creates more interests in their kid's education world. Consequently, the generation gap would no longer be as problematic or severe because the students could share at home what they were learning at school. They could read to their parents and be understood comprehensibly. Parents were also proud of their children when the children knew how to read. "Many adults also attended these schools, and it was not uncommon in the early years to have a father and son or daughter in the same class" (Larson, 1981, p. 25). Because the parents were keen and interested in education, this positive atmosphere propelled a learning culture that became part of lives of the indigenous tribes in rural Peru.

Unlike the apparent anxiety of the Indonesian government concerning diversity of instructional languages in primary schools, the Peruvian government greatly benefitted from employing bilingual education in their formal schools. The outcome was very encouraging, as it served to strengthen the unity of the country. Larson explains:

The Indians gather from the various tribal groups for their training courses and interact with one another, study together, observe one another's customs and languages, and in many cases become close friends, all within an atmosphere of patriotism. As a result of this experience, the tribes in the jungle have come to feel, for the first time, that they are part of a larger unit, the country of Peru. Through this interaction, they have also gained a tribal consciousness which is incredibly healthy when fitted into a national setting (Larson, 1981, p. 29).

Literacy Program in Papua New Guinea

Another example of vernacular language usage is described by Laszlo et al., (1998). The two missionaries worked hand in hand with the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL). SIL began work in Papua New Guinea (PNG) since 1956. SIL is presently working among 186 language groups, mostly in providing literacy material and having already completed over one hundred New Testament translations. For many years, English was the instructional language for formal education in PNG. However, a non-formal community-based vernacular language preschool movement spread throughout PNG. Partly because of the influence and data from these ongoing SIL literacy programs, in 1995 PNG decided to reform the English-only system with the help of SIL. Now schools use the local vernacular as the instructional language for kindergarten and grades 1 and 2, then gradually transition to English (Laszlo et al., 1998, p. xiii). Like in Peru, the PNG government realized the benefit of utilizing vernacular languages in its public schools.

Lister and Nagai (2004) refer to vernacular language as "a bridge" to read and write the prestige language in PNG. According to them, everyone in PNG experienced, as children, how difficult it was to learn and read and write English from the beginning without becoming aware of a sequence of sounds in their speech or understanding the sound-letter relationships in their own languages. "So the initial vernacular elementary education is a great benefit to the children" (Lister & Nagai, 2004, p. 27).

As a teacher at a public school in Maiwala Elementary School, Milne Bay Province, PNG, Lister and Nagai (2004, p. 28) observes that "... attending English elementary schools did not help the children to learn English adequately as there was no bridge for them to go across from the vernacular to English." Based upon several cases that were included in their article, Lister and Nagai revealed that usage of vernacular language as the instructional language at schools tremendously assisted their students to learn writing and reading both in their native language and in English as their prestige language (Lister & Nagai, 2004, pp. 28–33). Lister and Nagai's (2004) description corresponds to Larson's hypothesis of oral and written symbols discussed above in the Peruvian Amazonia case study.

Is It Possible to Use Vernacular Languages in in Highlands Papua Government Schools?

The circumstances and conditions of the local PNG people are not too different from that of the people in Papua because both countries are on the same island and share the same background, i.e., Melanesia. John Cutts, who first came to Papua as an 18-month-old with his missionary parents in 1954, and who is now still working among the Moni, explains the significance of vernacular language in primary school in Highlands Papua. From his observation thus far, he confirms that many first and second graders have a very difficult time transitioning from their village settings to the formal education of the primary school. The difficulty is mostly a barrier of understanding and many of these students subsequently drop out completely. Cutts' recommendation is to teach the first 3 years or more using their tribal language, in addition to Indonesian language. According to Cutts "Once they can read their own language I am sure it would be so much easier to learn to read Indonesian," (Cutts, 2009).

Having said all of the above, the ultimate aim of this paper is to offer a proposal to the Indonesian government and especially to the local jurisdiction of Papua province's governance to provide a special attention to the culture and languages of Papuan within the educational system. Moreover, the policy instilled by the Indonesian government that granted the Law of Special Autonomy of Papua has begun to encourage the development of local culture including tribal language. On October 22, 2001, President Megawati also enacted the Bill of Special Autonomy for the Province of Papua as the *Law of the Republic of Indonesia No. 21 of the year 2001*. On January 1, 2002, it was officially implemented in the Province of Papua (Sumule, 2002).

The most compelling point in the aforementioned bill is the recognition of the existence of Papuans and their cultures.

...That the Papuan community as God's creation, is part of a civilized society, who hold high human rights, religious values, democracy, law and cultural values in the customary law community and who have the right in all fairness to enjoy the results of the development. ...That the natives of the Papuan province is one of the groups of the Melanesian race, which is part of the Indonesian ethnic groups that has a variety of culture, history, customs, and its own language." (MPR RI (House of People's Representatives of The Republic of Indonesia), 2001).

In light of the liberty and autonomy given to the Papuan province to regulate its own territory, in essence the Indonesian government is exercising one of the national principles written on the national symbol of the mythical eagle Garuda which is, "Bhinneka Tunggal Ika" that means: unity in diversity (Frost, 2002).

Obstacles to be Encountered

There are indeed potential challenges to the implementing the usage of vernacular language in the villages of highlands Papua. The first challenge would be selecting which tribes need this style of education. SIL International, Indonesia Branch (2004) has amassed extensive data concerning the number of languages in Papua. At the time of writing, there are reportedly 742 languages in Indonesia, with 269 languages (36.25%) in West Papua (Lister & Nagai, 2004). Of these 269 languages, there are languages spoken by less than 300 people.

Pursuant to the above paragraph, this paper hopes to recommends the implementation of pilot projects in public elementary schools whose location meet two or more of the following criteria:

- (1) where the languages have a sufficiently large number of speakers,
- (2) areas that are remote from the urban areas, or
- (3) where the tribes do not mingle or socialize with other tribal groups.

Tribal groups that meet the above criteria do not have adequate access to the community in general who use Bahasa Indonesia as their common language. For instance, Dr. John Ellenberger, a C&MA missionary and linguist who worked among the Damal for 17 years (1957-1974), recommends that such a program utilizing the vernacular language be experimented at public schools among the Moni tribe (20.000 speakers), Damal (also known as Amungme) – (15.000 speakers), Dani – (270.000 speakers) and Mee – (100.000 speakers). Another reason for choosing these tribes is that according to Ellenberger, these tribes already have a well-developed writing system created by the previous missionaries (Ellenberger, 2009).

The second limitation would be the absence of competent teachers and adequate teaching materials. Here, strategic partnerships come into play with organizations such as SIL who are already have ongoing literacy programs in the various vernacular languages. SIL and the government can work together to recruit and train teachers and create teaching materials specific to each vernacular language. Native language speakers from each language group should be trained as teachers. Teacher candidate must be competent with both the native language as well as the national Indonesian language. If the government implements this program, surely there would be a designated budget allotted to it, similar to what was done by the PNG government.

The third constraint would be the geographical location of the villages where the tribes reside. Actually, this would not be an issue if the government has every intention and goodwill to prioritize vernacular language usage in the educational system at the primary school's level. According to the Law of Special Autonomy, "... at least 30 percent of the revenue referred to in Article 34 paragraph (3) letter b points 4) and 5), shall be allocated for education and at least 15 percent for health and nutrient improvement," (MPR RI (House of People's Representatives of The Republic of Indonesia), 2001).

The Proposal

If the government accepts the bilingual primary education, according to Larson, the following are the purposes for the vernacular language:

1. to initiate a child into school life,
2. to teach the processes of reading, writing and arithmetic,
3. as a tool for oral learning of prestige language,
4. as a diglot in advanced materials in arithmetic and social studies so that the student can understand the concepts being taught in the prestige language

5. by the teacher to make explanations of material being taught in the prestige language for the advanced classes which are using material in that language,
6. for the writing of tribal histories, legends, poetry, ballads, and other vernacular literature that reflects the distinct ethnic identity (Larson, 1981, p. 31).

On the other hand, according to Ajamiseba, the following are the purposes for the prestige language, Bahasa Indonesia:

1. as a second language which is introduced orally
2. for reading and writing after the process has been learned in the vernacular language
3. as another system for taking materials learned in arithmetic and social studies
4. as a second language to be learned well through pedagogical materials containing explanation in the vernacular. Bahasa Indonesia should thus be learned well enough so that the student is able to continue his advanced education in this medium (Ajamiseba, 1987, p. 11).

The curriculum of the educational system in primary school (six-year school) is to be implemented into two stages, namely,

1. The first stage consists of the basic three grades of the village primary school. It should be compulsory of every child and should be adapted to the specific need of the children, i.e., that of a community living in particular area.
2. The second stage consists of the remaining three years for those few who possess the capability for further education. They should be gathered into a central boarding school where concentrated attention should be paid to the use of the Indonesian Language, to active self-expression, to abstract thinking and the expansion of the students' outlook (Ajamiseba, 1987, p. 9)

Conclusion

Just as our Lord, Jesus Christ was willing to connect the *source*, to the *receptor* by using the communicational '*bridge*' of the culture and language of the locals; we can follow the footsteps of our Master Teacher and Master Communicator. Moreover, the proposal presented here is a helpful model for engaging the marginalized people groups in the Papuan highlands of Indonesia.

The success of the three case studies reviewed in this paper; bilingual primary education programs at Cibago Community, West Java, Indonesia; Peruvian Amazonia, South America and Papua New Guinea, suggest that this is a credible proposal for implementation in the Papua highlands. Not only did the pilot project show successful outcomes elsewhere in Indonesia, it has also been very successful in Papua New Guinea, which shares kinship affinity with Papua and is on the same island. The Indonesian government can initiate this. Moreover, the Papuan local authority, which was granted a special right from the central government through *The Law of Special Autonomy*, can also initiate such bilingual primary education program as a matter of priority in primary schools in Highlands Papua.

Finally, yet importantly, as ambassadors of Christ in this world, churches can also be the motivators for this program because majority of the literature in the tribal languages in Papua are depicted from Bible stories. Therefore, if the Bible (or portions of it) have already been translated into the local languages, it can be a very good device to advance the teaching of the Gospel to the kids and the adults in their own language. As Christian teachers, we need to consider that:

... each type of family structure in some way or another fallen and in conflict with the redeeming work of the Lord Jesus Christ. No family structure is God-given or biblically endorsed; families are human institutions that may be transformed through the redemptive work of Christ (Lingenfelter, 1998, pp. 116–117).

Hence, what has been prophesized in the book of Revelation can be fulfilled at the second coming of Christ, that is:

After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb," (Revelation 7:9-10 NIV).

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