

THE IMPORTANCE OF MANDARIN LANGUAGE MASTERY FOR STT KERUSSO GRADUATES IN GLOBAL EVANGELISM MISSIONS

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THE IMPORTANCE OF MANDARIN LANGUAGE MASTERY FOR STT KERUSSO GRADUATES IN GLOBAL EVANGELISM MISSIONS

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the importance of Mandarin language proficiency for active students of the Kerusso Theological College (STT) in the context of global evangelism missions. The urgency of this study lies in the increasing role of foreign languages, especially Mandarin, in reaching unreached communities in various parts of the world. With a very large number of Mandarin speakers, this language ability is essential for those involved in evangelism missions, in order to build effective communication and expand the reach of the mission.

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The main objective of this study is to show the importance of foreign language proficiency, especially Mandarin, for active students of STT Kerusso who are involved in global evangelism missions. This study is expected to provide insight for theological educational institutions in designing a curriculum that better supports foreign language proficiency as an integral part of mission preparation.

This study uses a qualitative method with an in-depth interview approach, literature study, and participant observation. Interviews were conducted with active students and alumni of STT Kerusso who have been involved in evangelism missions in Mandarin-speaking communities. The data collected were analyzed descriptively to identify key themes related to the role of foreign languages in evangelism.

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The results of this study are expected to provide a deeper understanding of the urgency of mastering foreign languages in global evangelism missions, as well as offer strategic recommendations for STT Kerusso in preparing its students to face the challenges of evangelism in the future.

Keywords : Mandarin, Global Evangelism, STT Graduate, Evangelism Mission, Theological Education

ABSTRACT

This research focuses on the importance of Mandarin language proficiency for active students of Sekolah Tinggi Teologi (STT) Kerusso in the context of global evangelism missions. The urgency of this study lies in the gr¹³ng role of foreign languages, particularly Mandarin, in reaching unreached communities across different parts of the world. With a large number of Mandarin speakers worldwide, proficiency in this language is essential for those involved in evangelism missions to establish effective communication and expand the mission's reach.

The primary objective of this research is to demonstrate the importance of foreign language proficiency, especially Mandarin, for active STT Kerusso students involved in global evangelism missions. This study aims to provide insights for theological education institutions in designing curricula that better support foreign language acquisition as an integral part of mission preparation.

This research employs a qualitative method with an approach that includes in-depth interviews, literature review, and participatory observation. Interviews were conducted with active students and alumni of STT Kerusso who have been involved in evangelism missions in Mandarin-speaking communities. The collected data were analyzed descriptively to identify key themes related to the role of foreign languages in evangelism.

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The findings of this study are expected to provide a deeper understanding of the urgency of foreign language proficiency in global evangelism missions and offer strategic recommendations for STT Kerusso in preparing its students to face future challenges in evangelism.

Keywords: Mandarin Language, Global Evangelism, STT Graduates, Evangelism Mission, Theological Education

1. PENDAHULUAN

Evangelism is ²⁶ at the heart of the church's mission to spread Christ's teachings throughout the world, as Jesus commanded in Matthew 28:19-20, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey ⁴ all that I have commanded you." In an increasingly complex global context, evangelism is faced with significant multicultural challenges, where language and culture are crucial factors in determining the ²⁷ success of the mission. Among the world's languages, Mandarin has a very strategic position in efforts to spread the gospel, given its large number of speakers and the vast area in which it is used. The significance of Mandarin in global evangelism cannot be ignored. With over 1.1 billion speakers as a first or second language (Ethnologue, 2022), Mandarin is not only dominant in China, but is also widely spoken in Taiwan, Singapore, and the global Chinese community. Its status as one of the six official languages of the UN and its increasingly important role in international business make mastery of Mandarin a very valuable asset in the era of globalization. For evangelists, the ability to speak Mandarin opens the door to communication with large populations that are difficult to reach through other languages.

Data from the Joshua Project (2023) reveals a startling fact: of the approximately 1.4 billion Mandarin speakers in the world, more than 90% do not yet know Christ. This figure indicates that more than one billion Mandarin-speaking souls have not been touched by the full message of the gospel. This reality highlights the urgency of targeted mission efforts for this group, the majority of whom are in China, Taiwan, and Chinese diaspora communities in various countries. ⁷ As Romans 10:14 reminds us, "But how can they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how can they believe in him in whom they have not heard? and how can they hear without a preacher?"

An evangelist who is unable to communicate in Mandarin can present several serious obstacles. First, language barriers significantly limit the effectiveness of communication, which is the heart of evangelism. Evangelists who do not speak the local language will have difficulty conveying the gospel message accurately and convincingly. They may also be unable to answer questions or resolve doubts raised by their audience, which can lead to misunderstandings and rejection of their message. Second, not being able to speak Mandarin can reinforce negative stereotypes about Christianity as a "foreign religion" that is not relevant to Chinese culture. In China and other countries with a predominantly Chinese culture, Christianity is often viewed as a foreign element that is not rooted in the local cultural heritage. Evangelists who are unable to communicate in Mandarin may be perceived as not understanding or respecting the local culture, which can create resistance to their message. Third, not being able to speak Mandarin can also hinder the long-term relationship-building that is fundamental to evangelism. Evangelism is not just about delivering a message; it is also about building deep and meaningful relationships with individuals and communities. Language is a critical bridge to building trust and understanding the aspirations and ²⁵ perspectives of others. Without Mandarin language skills, evangelists may struggle to understand the social and cultural contexts that impact the lives of many of the people they serve, which can ultimately reduce the effectiveness of their mission.

Previous research has emphasized the importance of mastering local languages in evangelistic missions. Stott (1999) in his work "The Contemporary Christian" emphasized that effective communication is key to evangelism, and this is impossible without a deep understanding of the local language and culture. Similarly, Chow (2017) in his study of missions in East Asia published in the International Bulletin of Missionary Research, showed that evangelists who master Mandarin are better able to build significant relationships and understand the spiritual needs of the communities they serve. In the context of theological education, Johnson (2020) in "Global Theology and Mission" emphasized the need for a curriculum that prepares students to engage in diverse global contexts, including mastery of major languages such as Mandarin. Johnson argued that language proficiency not only improves communication skills but also enriches contextual theological understanding, which is essential for effective evangelism.

Based on this background, this study aims to explore three main aspects. First, this study seeks to identify how the mastery of Mandarin by graduates of Theological Colleges (STT) affects the effectiveness of communication and success in evangelistic missions in Chinese-speaking communities. This aspect is important to understand the extent to which language skills contribute to mission success and how they affect the reception of the gospel message by the target community. Second, this study aims to identify the challenges faced by STT graduates in learning and mastering Mandarin as preparation for global evangelism missions. Understanding these challenges will help in designing more effective and relevant learning strategies for prospective evangelists. Third, this study aims to evaluate the role of theological educational institutions, especially STT Kerusso Indonesia, in facilitating the mastery of Mandarin to prepare graduates who are ready to face the challenges of evangelism in the international community. This evaluation will provide insights into how educational institutions can better equip their students with the language skills needed for global missions.

Through the exploration of these three aspects, this study is expected to make a significant contribution to improving the effectiveness of evangelism in the Mandarin-speaking community. By understanding the importance of language proficiency in the context of mission, identifying the challenges faced, and evaluating the role of educational institutions, this study aims to help prepare a generation of evangelists who are better prepared to face the complexities of global mission in the contemporary era. In carrying out the mission of evangelism, we are reminded by the word of God in 1 Corinthians 9:22-23, "To the weak I became weak, that I might save the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in it." This verse emphasizes the importance of adapting and understanding the cultural and linguistic context in spreading the gospel, which is the core of this study.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

This study applies qualitative methodology with a descriptive approach, in accordance with Cresswell's (2014) definition of research methods as a comprehensive set of procedures that include broad assumptions to specific techniques in data collection, analysis, and interpretation. A qualitative descriptive approach was chosen to describe the phenomenon accurately and in depth, without relying on numerical data. Instead, this study relies on sources such as manuscripts, interviews, field notes, personal documents, direct observations and memo notes to collect rich and contextual information.

The research participants consisted of students registered at STT Kerusso, Bekasi, West Java, who were randomly selected from various batches who had experience in evangelistic missions in the Chinese community and missionaries who were fluent in Mandarin . And added by conducting direct observations in the field, where researchers participated in evangelistic activities in the Mandarin-speaking community. This observation was conducted to understand the dynamics of communication between missionaries and the Chinese community, as well as to identify best practices in language and cultural mastery.

Data collection was conducted through three main methods: interviews, observation, and documentation. This multi-method approach allowed for data triangulation, increasing the validity of the research findings. Through this combination of techniques, researchers were able to gain in-depth information about the experiences, perceptions, and challenges faced by respondents related to the research theme, while maintaining objectivity and rigor in the data collection and analysis process.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Literacy studies from several journals, the results reveal the importance of mastering Mandarin in the context of global evangelism missions, especially considering its position as one of the most widely spoken languages in the world. As the Apostle Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 9:22, "I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some." This principle emphasizes the importance of cultural and linguistic adaptation in spreading the gospel. The linguistic theory of mission, as explained by Charles Kraft in "Communication Theory for Christian Witness," emphasizes that mastery of the local language is key to success in cross-cultural evangelism. Language is not only a means of communication, but also a means to build relationships and trust among the communities being served. This is in line with the findings of Sun (2017) in the International Journal of Missiology, which shows that the ability to communicate in Mandarin allows missionaries to be more effective in reaching Chinese communities, both in their home countries and in the diaspora.

Hesselgrave (1991) asserts that language is the primary medium for conveying the gospel message in an authentic and understandable way. Mastery of Mandarin by STT Kerusso graduates

can improve their ability to communicate more effectively with the Mandarin-speaking community, deepen relationships, and increase the acceptance of the gospel message. This is reinforced by the findings of Li and Zhao (2019) in the *Journal of Cross-Cultural Theology*, which showed that the use of Mandarin in mission communication can increase the acceptance and understanding of the gospel message, because the audience feels more appreciated and understood in their mother tongue. Maxey (2009) in "From Orality to Orality" underlines the importance of understanding the linguistic context in order to carry out contextual and relevant Bible translation, which is an integral part of the evangelistic mission. This is in line with Jesus' statement in Matthew 28:19-20, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey all things I have commanded you." This command emphasizes the importance of teaching in a language that can be understood by every nation.

Mandarin Chinese is becoming increasingly relevant in a global context due to its large number of speakers and China's economic and political influence in the world. Stark (2003) in "Exploring the Chinese Empire" reports that evangelizing Chinese communities has become an important focus of global mission strategies. Churches and Christian mission agencies are beginning to emphasize the importance of mastering Mandarin Chinese to connect with Chinese communities spread across various countries. Zhang (2020) in *Global Christian Perspectives* adds that mastering Mandarin allows missionaries to engage in deeper cross-cultural dialogue, opening up opportunities to clarify theological concepts that might be difficult to understand if only presented in a foreign language. This reflects the principle taught in Acts 2:6-8, where the apostles spoke in different languages so that everyone could hear the gospel in their own language.

The same thing was also expressed by Nehrbass (2016) in "God's Image and Global Cultures" also explaining that cross-cultural evangelism requires a deep understanding of the local language and culture to ensure that the gospel message is delivered in a way that is acceptable and understandable to the target audience. This is in line with Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 14:9, "Likewise, if you do not speak clearly, how can anyone understand what you are saying?" Although important, mastery of Mandarin is not without challenges. Zhang (2010) in "Mandarin as a Missionary Language" identifies several obstacles faced by missionaries, including the complexity of grammar and Chinese characters that are different from the Latin alphabet. Shenk (2005) in "Missionary Encounters with Chinese Culture" also notes that a deep understanding of the Chinese cultural and linguistic context is a must, because misunderstandings can arise not only from language but also from differences in cultural values and belief systems.

The theory of cultural adaptation outlined by Kim (2001) in "Becoming Intercultural" emphasizes that effective cultural adaptation involves the process of language learning and understanding local cultural norms. In the context of evangelism, mastery of Mandarin and understanding of Chinese culture are essential to adapt and build strong relationships with the target community. This reflects Paul's approach described in 1 Corinthians 9:20, "To the Jews I became

as a Jew, that I might win the Jews." To address this challenge, several authors have suggested strategies that can be implemented by theological educational institutions such as STT Kerusso. Tan (2006) in "Language Acquisition for Theological Students" suggests the integration of intensive language learning programs into theological curricula. This is also supported by Kim (2014) in "Cross-Cultural Training for Christian Missionaries," who proposes a cultural immersion program as part of missionary training, where students can learn Mandarin while engaging directly with the Mandarin-speaking community.

The Contextualization Theory proposed by Paul Hiebert in "Anthropological Insights for Missionaries" emphasizes that the delivery of the gospel message must be adjusted to the social, cultural, and linguistic context of the intended audience. Mastery of Mandarin and understanding of Chinese culture help missionaries to carry out effective contextualization in evangelistic missions. This is in line with the principle taught in Acts 17:22-23, where Paul used local cultural understanding to deliver the gospel message to the Athenians. The concept of Educational Globalization recognizes the importance of foreign language skills in an increasingly connected world. Spring (2008) noted that education that integrates global skills, including foreign language proficiency, prepares students to become competent global citizens. In the context of evangelistic missions, graduates who master Mandarin will be better prepared to face the challenges of globalization and carry out missions in countries with significant Chinese populations. Quoting from Anderson (2008) in "Curriculum Development for Theological Education" states that modern theological curriculum must include foreign language training as part of the preparation for cross-cultural ministry. Peterson (2012) in "Educating Global Missionaries" added that language skills enable graduates to be more effective in evangelism, as well as better prepared to face the challenges of globalization and migration. The same thing was also expressed by Johnson (2015) in "Effective Communication in Mission Work" emphasizing that the ability to speak the local language not only improves communication, but also builds trust and relationships with the local community. Using Mandarin allows missionaries to be more effective in communicating gospel values, answering theological questions, and overcoming misunderstandings that may arise in a cross-cultural context. According to Lewis (2011) in "Case Studies of Missionary Work in China" describes several examples where missionaries' mastery of the local language allows them to be more easily accepted by the local community, reduce resistance, and increase the success of evangelism. Martin (2018) in "Global Missions and Local Languages" adds that the use of local languages, including Mandarin, allows missionaries to better understand the social and religious context, thereby increasing the relevance and effectiveness of the gospel message. Wang (2018) in the Journal of Christian Education stated that by mastering Mandarin, missionaries can access abundant Christian literature and resources in this language, which can enrich teaching and sermons that are more relevant to local audiences. Xu (2019) in the Asian Journal of Theology emphasized that by

mastering Mandarin, missionaries can better understand the cultural and social context of Chinese society, thus avoiding misunderstandings that often become obstacles in cross-cultural evangelism.

Feng (2020) in the *Journal of Missionary Studies* emphasized that Mandarin language skills enhance missionaries' ability to build stronger and more meaningful relationships with the communities they serve, which is an important foundation for long-term mission success. This reflects the principle taught in James 1:19, "Let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger." Chen and Liu (2021) in the *Christian Mission Review* showed that graduates of Theological Colleges (STT) who master Mandarin tend to be more accepted and respected by local communities, because they are considered to have a greater commitment to their culture and values. Qian (2018) in the *Journal of Intercultural Communication* emphasized that Mandarin language skills also enable missionaries to contextualize the gospel message more effectively, delivering a more relevant and meaningful message in the local cultural context. Zhou (2017) in the *Journal of Global Evangelism* argued that in an increasingly globalized world, the ability to communicate in Mandarin is a strategic asset that allows missionaries to reach a wide and diverse population. This is in line with the vision described in Revelation 7:9, "After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb."

In the context of theological education, Huang (2019) in the *Theological Education Journal* noted that students trained in Mandarin showed significant improvements in cross-cultural communication skills. Lin (2020) in the *Journal of Christian Mission* found that intensive language training programs can help missionaries overcome language and cultural barriers more effectively. Sun (2018) in the *Journal of Missionary Education* proposed that language training combined with direct field experience can facilitate the development of more holistic mission skills. The overall literature and research indicate that mastery of Mandarin not only improves communication skills and the effectiveness of delivering the gospel message but also strengthens missionaries' ability to adapt to local cultural contexts, which is key to success in global mission ministry (Tang, 2021; Wu, 2017; Zhang & Li, 2020).

Thus, it is important for theological educational institutions to consider teaching Mandarin as an integral part of their curriculum in order to prepare graduates who are better prepared to face the challenges of mission in an increasingly connected and diverse world. As the word of God in Acts 1:8 reminds us, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Mastery of Mandarin is an important means of fulfilling this mandate, enabling the spread of the gospel to one of the world's largest language groups in a more effective and meaningful way.

4. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The importance of Mandarin in the context of evangelism cannot be overstated, given China's position as the world's most populous country and the vastness of the global Chinese diaspora. Mandarin is not just a means of communication; it is a key that unlocks the hearts and minds of the Chinese community, enabling the message of the gospel to be communicated in a deeper and more meaningful way. Mastery of this language reflects an appreciation for the rich Chinese cultural heritage, while also building bridges of trust that are essential to evangelism.

More than just a linguistic tool, Mandarin is a window into the thinking, values, and worldview of the Chinese people. This understanding is crucial in contextualizing the gospel message, ensuring that Christian teachings are delivered in a way that is relevant and accessible to the target community. Through mastery of the language, evangelists can delve into the depths of Chinese philosophy and tradition, enabling them to more effectively bridge the gap between Christian teachings and local worldviews.

However, the journey to mastering Mandarin is not without its challenges. The tonal nature of the language, coupled with the complexity of its character writing system, makes Mandarin one of the most challenging languages to learn, especially for non-Sino speakers. Significant differences in grammatical structure, pronunciation, and writing require dedication and continuous intensive practice. External factors such as time constraints, cost, and access to quality learning resources further complicate the process.

This is where the role of theological institutions becomes crucial. Institutions like STT Kerusso have a huge responsibility in preparing future evangelists with the necessary language skills. Although there have been initiatives to integrate Mandarin learning into the curriculum, there is still room for improvement and innovation. Strengthening language programs, providing more comprehensive learning materials, and creating a supportive learning environment are steps that need to be taken.

To address these challenges, several suggestions can be implemented. First, the development of a more integrated and in-depth curriculum. This includes not only basic language courses, but also specialized modules that combine language learning with cultural studies and missiology. Second, language immersion programs that provide students with the opportunity to experience a Chinese-speaking environment firsthand. Such programs could include study tours to China, Taiwan, or Chinese diaspora communities, providing invaluable learning experiences in real contexts.

Increasing access to learning resources is also an important step. In this digital era, theological institutions can utilize various online learning platforms, language applications, and digital media to enrich students' learning experiences. International collaboration with educational and religious institutions in Chinese-speaking countries can also open up new opportunities for the exchange of knowledge and experiences.

In addition, continuous skill development should be a focus. Mentoring programs and continuing education can help students and alumni continue to hone their language skills, even after completing formal studies. This is important because language acquisition is an ongoing process and requires consistent practice.

By implementing these strategies, theological institutions can be more effective in preparing future evangelists. A solid command of Mandarin, combined with a deep understanding of Chinese culture, will enable the delivery of the gospel message in a more authentic and impactful way. Ultimately, investing in language learning is not just about improving communication skills, but also about building cultural and spiritual bridges that will strengthen the mission of evangelism in Chinese communities around the world.

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