



Proclaiming the Gospel in the Midst of Pluralism: Contextual Evangelism Strategies in Jayapura-Papua

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Abstract

The aims of this research is to formulate evangelistic strategies and explores the internal and external challenges in the Indonesian especially in Jayapura-Papua context. The method used is qualitative with interview techniques with pastors, evangelists, and congregation elders. Data analysis uses the Miles and Huberman model, namely through reduction, presentation of data in tables, and drawing conclusions. The results of the study show that evangelism in Indonesia faces various obstacles in three areas: cultural, social, and political. Internal challenges in the cultural field include a lack of understanding of contextual theology and the application of gospel inculturation, while external challenges are in the form of cultural diversity and rejection of Christian symbols. In the social sphere, the internal is the division between denominations, while the external is majority pressure and a negative stigma against evangelism. In the political field, internal challenges are in the form of a lack of church synergy in responding to regulations, while external challenges include legal restrictions and intolerance. This research shows the evangelistic strategies that integrate understanding of local culture with adaptive theological reflection. This is effective in answering challenges and conveying the gospel in a relevant way in the midst of the plurality of Jayapura society

Keywords: *Evangelism, Mission Challenges, Pluralism, Mission Strategies*

Abstrak

Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk merumuskan strategi penginjilan serta mengeksplorasi tantangan internal dan eksternal dalam konteks Indonesia khususnya Jayapura. Metode yang digunakan adalah kualitatif dengan teknik wawancara terhadap pendeta, penginjil, dan tua-tua jemaat. Analisis data menggunakan model Miles dan Huberman, yakni melalui reduksi, penyajian data dalam tabel, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa penginjilan di Indonesia menghadapi berbagai hambatan dalam tiga bidang: budaya, sosial, dan politik. Tantangan internal di bidang budaya mencakup minimnya pemahaman teologi kontekstual dan penerapan inkulturasi Injil, sedangkan tantangan eksternalnya berupa keberagaman adat dan penolakan terhadap simbol-simbol Kristen. Dalam bidang sosial, internalnya adalah perpecahan antar

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Proses Artikel Diterima 14-09-2025; Revisi 05-11-2025; Terbit Online 15-11-2025;

denominasi, sementara eksternalnya berupa tekanan mayoritas dan stigma negatif terhadap penginjilan. Di sisi lain, bidang politik mengungkapkan adanya tantangan internal berupa kurangnya sinergi gereja dalam merespons regulasi, sedangkan eksternal meliputi pembatasan hukum dan intoleransi. penelitian ini menunjukkan perumusan strategi penginjilan kontekstual yang mengintegrasikan pemahaman budaya lokal dengan refleksi teologis yang adaptif. Pendekatan ini diyakini efektif untuk menjawab tantangan dan menyampaikan Injil secara relevan di tengah pluralitas masyarakat Jayapura.

Kata Kunci: Penginjilan, Tantangan Misi, Pluralisme Agama, Strategi Misi

1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a country with a very high religious and cultural diversity. It has total of population more than 270 million people which consists of 10.47% of them embrace Christianity. They consist of= 7.41% for Christianity and Catholics 3.06% (Wulandari, 2022). In recent decades, the numbers of Christian community has experienced significant growth. According to census data there is population growth in eighteen years from 2000 to 2018. It accumulated 5.7% to 7.6% for Chirstian society. However, this growth does not significantly reflect success on evangelism, especially in the context of a pluralistic society like Indonesia. The urgency of evangelism in the Indonesian context is not only related to the spread of teachings but also to maintain the existence of faith in the midst of complex social, political, and cultural challenges. The practice of evangelization is often perceived negatively when associated with the term of Christianization which triggers social resistance and conflict in various regions(Haans, 2021). This makes evangelism not only a matter of theological communication but also of interfaith and cultural sensitivity.

One of the primary challenges in the dissemination of the gospel lies in the pervasive fear of interreligious conflict. Empirical evidence indicates that evangelistic initiatives are frequently perceived as aggressive attempts at mass conversion, a perception that inadvertently exacerbates the social distance between Christian and non-Christian communities. In certain instances, this misperception has escalated into rejection and even acts of violence directed against the church's mission (Mendoza, 2022). Consequently, these dynamics underscore the necessity for evangelism to be carried out through approaches that are more reflective, context-sensitive, and culturally attuned.

Another significant challenge originates from within the church itself, where many local congregations struggle with limited human resources and inadequate strategic frameworks for effective evangelism. Insufficient training for church members, coupled with the absence of structured support in the form of curricula and financial allocations, has considerably constrained the efficacy of missionary efforts. Indeed, several studies have revealed that a substantial number of church members lack the confidence to bear witness or to proclaim the gospel on a personal level (Wulandari, 2022).

Furthermore, the aspect of contextualization relates to a critical factor in the process of evangelization. Local culture an linguistics context have proved that they are accepted in contributing evangelism. Case studies conducted in the Nias region, it demonstrated that the incorporation of indigenous terms and symbols can enhance the community's understanding of the gospel message These findings underscore the necessity of an approach that affirms and respects local values, rather than merely transmitting doctrinal formulations from external contexts.

Unfortunately, the academic literature shows that there is a gap in teaching. Researchers are more likely to focus on the quantitative aspect of growth rather than qualitative growth. Scientists tend to overlook aspects of the cultural approach that have a significant impact compared to the approach of other approaches. This weakness shows that research needs to need an effective strategy in implementing evangelism as in the socio-cultural context of Indonesian society (Haans, 2021).

The central issue addressed in this article concerns the ways in which negative perceptions of evangelism, inadequate contextual strategies, and insufficient training for congregants constitute significant challenges in the dissemination of the gospel. The persistent gap between traditional evangelistic approaches and the lived realities of local communities emerges as a substantial barrier to communicating Christ's message of love in an inclusive and peaceful manner.

Wenda et al., (2022) revealed that the success of evangelism did not only depend on theological rhetorical skills but also on the active role of evangelizers and their ability to speak languages and understand the needs of the congregation. These were fundamental aspects that must be understood and implemented in the evangelistic process. Furthermore, Banga' and friends explained that the use of a language style that considered local context and needs contributed greatly to creating an effective communicative atmosphere in evangelism, while strengthening the congregation's understanding of the message being conveyed (Banga, Kabanga, & Tabuni, 2023). In addition, the ability to convey the Gospel must be accompanied by an inculturation process, which was to integrate the gospel message with the local culture as an effective method of preaching. Tari described how the theological process carried out in the context of tongkonan, which was a symbol of Toraja indigenous culture, so that the gospel can go hand in hand with local cultural values (Tari 2018). In a similar context, Maeja et al., (2024) outlined how the recognition of Christ can be realized through local cultures such as the ma'rapu tradition in Toraja. This showed that the gospel can develop through an inculturative approach by adapting to the local culture in order to convey the message of Christ in a contextual way.

Therefore, this study aims to formulate evangelistic strategies while identifying both the internal and external challenges encountered in their implementation. The findings are expected to offer a theoretical contribution to the field of missiology and evangelistic practice, while also serving as a practical reference for churches in developing training programs, interfaith communication strategies, and adaptive, contextually effective forms of ministry.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative approach to explore in depth contextual evangelistic strategies in the midst of a pluralistic society in Jayapura-Papua. This approach was chosen as it is appropriate to understand complex social, cultural, and religious phenomena and relates to evangelistic practices that are inseparable from the local context. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with pastors, evangelists, and congregations involved in cross-cultural ministry, particularly in the Papua region. In addition, the researcher also conducted participatory observations of church activities related to evangelism, including contextual worship and community service. Documentation in the form of teaching materials, liturgical texts, and mission guides were also analyzed to support field data.

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The data analysis process was carried out thematically to identify the patterns of strategies used in contextual evangelism. The analysis stages include data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions with reference to the Miles & Huberman's approach, Miles & Huberman, (1992). The researcher explores key themes such as the use of local languages, the inculturation of cultural values, and adaptive communication strategies in the context of religious pluralism. The data that has been collected and analyzed is then interpreted to understand how a social- and culturally sensitive approach to evangelism can increase gospel acceptance in the community. The results of this analysis are expected to contribute to the development of more relevant evangelistic theories and practices in Indonesia.

3. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Finding

Evangelism in Indonesia has not always experienced a smooth path but there are obstacles that have a significant influence on the development of evangelism. These obstacles and challenges are reviewed from the cultural, social, and political fields. Barriers to evangelism stem from internal and external challenges. In the cultural field, it is in direct contact with the cultural contextual, in the social field it is related to the social aspect, while in the political field it is related to norms and power. The following is a description of the internal and external challenges in the cultural, social, and political fields in the practice of evangelism in Indonesia.

Tabel 1. Internal and External Challenges

Field	Internal Challenges	External Challenges
Culture	- Contextual understanding of theology	- Complex cultural and customary diversity.
	- Lack of application of gospel inculturation	- Penolakan budaya lokal terhadap simbol Local culture's rejection of Christian symbols
Social	- Inter-denominational divisions	- Majority community pressure on minorities
		- Negative prejudices of apostasy and Christianization
Politics	- There is no synergy between church institutions to respond to state regulations	- Legal restrictions (e.g. Blasphemy Law, Decree of 2 Ministers)
		- Intolerance

The limited contextual theological understanding among church leaders, such as preach, evangelists, and elders, does not arise in a vacuum. Some of them underlying factors contribute to this limitation. *First*, theological education in many Indonesian institution tends to adopt Western frameworks, emphasizing doctrinal orthodoxy rather than contextual engagement. As a result, contextual theology often remains peripheral in theological formation. *Second*, there is a historical gap between theology and practice, where local church leaders often inherit rigid ecclesiastical traditions that prioritize evangelistic zeal over

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cultural sensitivity. This leads to a limited capacity to reinterpret the gospel within Indonesia's multicultural context. *Third*, institutional and structural factors also play a role. Many church organizations lack continuing theological formation programs that address the evolving socio-cultural dynamics of pluralism and interfaith interaction. Finally, the sociopolitical environment tends to make church leaders cautious, even resistant, to contextual innovation. Consequently, despite long engagement with pluralism, many leaders remain within the safety of traditional theological patterns that are less adaptive to Indonesia's pluralistic realities.

3.2 DISCUSSION

3.2.1. Internal and External Challenges in the Cultural Field

Theology is a human effort to understand and interpret God and His teachings correctly and rationally. In the context of Christianity, theology means delving into the teachings of the Christian faith through the study of the Bible, doctrine, church traditions, Christian ethics, and spirituality. One particular form of this theological approach is contextual theology, which is the attempt to understand and convey the truth about God in a particular social, cultural, and historical context. Each region has a different cultural background, so the understanding of Allah needs to be adjusted to the reality and life experience of the local community.

However, in the context of evangelism in Indonesia today, there are still serious challenges where evangelicals' understanding of theology, especially contextual theology, is still relatively minimal. This has an impact on the less effective delivery of the Gospel as good news (Purwantara, 2021). Lack of contextual understanding also affects the implementation of the inculturation approach in evangelism. This approach is a process of preaching the gospel that pays attention to and appreciates the local culture, so that the Christian message can be received and lived deeply without losing the essence of its teachings. The gospel is not imposed on foreigners but dialogues with the values, symbols, language, and socio-cultural practices of the local community. The application of inculturation can be seen in various aspects of faith life, such as the use of local languages in liturgy, the integration of traditional music and dance in worship, the use of traditional clothing by church ministers, and the processing of local symbols in the expression of the Christian faith. Sahureka & Parinussa (2023) state that one form of an effective contextual approach to building the faith of the congregation is through Raya worship with ethnic nuances. This shows that understanding contextual theology and the application of inculturation is an important step in conveying God's word in a relevant and meaningful way in various cultural contexts as good news.

To understand the challenges of evangelism more broadly, it is necessary to see that externally, evangelism faces obstacles in the form of complex cultures and diverse customs. One of the main challenges is the rejection by some people of symbols of Christianity that are considered foreign or contrary to local cultural values. Kosmanto Kosmanto (2020) described that the biggest challenge in delivering the gospel is the lack of understanding of the local community regarding the methods and techniques applied by evangelists. Indonesia, as a country that has a very wide cultural diversity, needs to present its own dynamics in the process of preaching the Gospel. This diversity has a direct impact on the effectiveness of evangelism and the inculturation process because each ethnic group has

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different perspectives, symbolic language, and spiritual practices. Therefore, the evangelistic approach needs to be done with cultural sensitivity so that the gospel can be accepted without causing rejection or cultural conflict

3.2.2. Internal and External Challenges in the Social Field

The social field is a field in social society, phenomena occur in various social fields according to the ongoing context. The challenges of evangelism that occur are motivated by sharing factors that are happening in society. In line with Hannas, Jesus' evangelism, especially to the Samaritans, faced complex social obstacles. So evangelism and its constraints in the social field are diverse and complex according to the context in the area where evangelism is carried out. Internally, Christians still face the challenge of claiming doctrinal truth that often claims to be the most correct and most in line with the Bible. In some cases, the biblical text is interpreted literally and textually without considering the principle of unity in Christ as well as the broader theological context. This approach is often used as a basis for justifying exclusive claims to the truth of one's own teachings, which can ultimately cause tension and division in society (Rerung, Jaya, & Patana, 2022). A narrow understanding of such doctrines has the potential to create divisions among Christians that then contradict the spirit of unity as one body of Christ and can hinder the church's witness in the world.

On the other hand, some studies show that pressure from the majority group on minority communities is one of the major obstacles in evangelism. The spread of the gospel has stagnated due to strong social pressure and resistance from the surrounding environment. Bolung (2023) revealed that in addition to local challenges, there are also significant global challenges in the implementation of Christian missions. One of these global challenges is the emergence of injustices in various social contexts that complicate the space for evangelistic ministry.

In addition to injustice, negative prejudice is also an obstacle to the spread of the gospel. One form of prejudice that is commonly encountered is the accusation that evangelism is an attempt at apostasy. In a pluralistic society like Indonesia, evangelism is often misunderstood as an act that threatens social stability and interreligious harmony. This arises from high religious sensitivity and concerns about the disruption of social harmony due to faith spreading activities that are considered to affect the beliefs of other people. In fact, theologically and practically, evangelism in the Christian tradition is the act of conveying the message of salvation in Jesus Christ that is done with love (Matthew 28:19-20), respecting individual freedom, and without coercion (Stevanus, 2020). Evangelism is part of a call to faith based on love and spiritual responsibility, not a form of propaganda or manipulation to force conversions

3.2.3. Internal and External Challenges in the Political Field

The political field is a field that is engaged in normative aspects. In a country, a normative basis is needed that frames society to act in accordance with applicable norms and regulations. Similarly, religious matters require rules that frame citizens to act in accordance with the norms that frame them. Indonesia as a country that is pluralistic in terms of religion frames its citizens with religious norms so that they are more inclusive. Since the beginning of independence, the Republic of Indonesia has regulated and guaranteed freedom of religion and the right of every citizen to worship according to his or her beliefs. This guarantee is explicitly stated in the Constitution of 1945 Article 29 verse (2) which states that the state

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guarantees the freedom of each citizen to embrace his or her own religion and worship according to his religion and belief. In addition, there are a number of derivative regulations that strengthen these guarantees such as Law Number 39 of 1999 concerning Human Rights, especially Article 22 which affirms the right to embrace and practice religion. In addition, there is also a Joint Regulation of the Minister of Religion and the Minister of Home Affairs Number 9 and 8 of 2006 which regulates religious harmony and the establishment of houses of worship, as well as a Presidential Instruction issued to deal with interreligious conflicts.

However, the existence of these regulations has not been fully responded to proactively by church institutions. In practice, the church is often passive and focuses more on internal development and independent congregational ministry. The lack of synergy and active involvement in utilizing the space of religious freedom to develop and spread the gospel is one of the challenges faced. Therefore, more contextual awareness and strategies are needed so that the church can play a more active role in responding to the legal guarantees that have been provided by the state.

On the other hand, the existence of intolerance in society also triggers the emergence of apathy, both from individuals and certain groups. This is exacerbated by the occurrence of deviations from existing regulations, especially due to the neglect or lack of firmness from the government in enforcing the law and protecting religious freedom. When acts of intolerance such as the rejection of the establishment of houses of worship and hate speech are left unpunished, it creates distrust of the state as the guarantor of constitutional rights.

This situation has a direct impact on the spirit of evangelism and the religious life of Christians. Churches and religious institutions have become more cautious, even tending to close themselves out of fear of conflict or social pressure. In conditions like this, the role of the state is indispensable to be present as a facilitator of justice and a guardian of harmony. Fair and non-discriminatory law enforcement, as well as public education on the importance of tolerance and respect for religious freedom, are important steps to create a safe space for all religious people to express their faith, including in legitimate and peaceful evangelistic activities (Labobar & Darmawan, 2022).

In addition to internal and external challenges in the cultural, social, and political fields, it is necessary to formulate a strategy for the implementation of relevant and effective evangelistic methods. One of the main approaches is contextual evangelism, which is an effort to preach the gospel by paying attention to the strength of local culture and making adjustments to the values that live in the local community. This approach includes two important aspects, namely adaptation and inculturation. Adaptation refers to the ability to adapt the delivery of the gospel message to a specific socio-cultural context, while inculturation is the process of encountering the Christian faith and local culture creatively and dialogically, without eliminating the essence of the teachings of the Gospel itself (Pasaribu, 2025). He added that in the teachings of Jesus Christ, culture is often integrated as a means of teaching such as the use of analogies in parables that are closely related to the life of the Jewish community at that time.

In addition to the contextual approach, congregational training is an important strategy in evangelism. Through directed training, the congregation is not only strengthened in faith, but also equipped to become mission actors who are ready to answer the challenges of the times. This training aims to form missionary cadres who are able to preach the gospel in a creative, relevant, and responsible way. In the face of changing global dynamics, this kind of training is becoming increasingly important so that God's word can continue to be delivered with an innovative approach and in accordance with the context of today's society.

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The internal and external challenges in the cultural, social, and political spheres, evangelism in Indonesia requires a more specific and contextual strategy that responds to pluralism and social dynamics. This study proposes a “contextual-diaconal-dialogical” evangelism strategy, combining three interrelated dimensions namely Contextual Witness (Kesaksian Kontekstual), Evangelism should be expressed through *living witness* (*marturia*) rather than mere proclamation. The gospel is embodied in everyday life, social justice, and communal solidarity. This includes promoting peace, honesty, care for creation, and solidarity with the marginalized as living reflections of the gospel message (GKI Papua, *Teologi Tanah Papua*, 2016). In other side Inclusive Diaconia (*Pelayanan Kasih Inklusif*), Diaconal ministry must go beyond the church walls and serve all people regardless of faith or ethnicity. Programs such as *Gerakan Kasih Sosial* of GKJ and *GBI Care* show that inclusive social service can become a medium of evangelism that communicates God’s love in action. This approach allows the church to bear witness without confrontation, strengthening social harmony amid religious diversity. More over, Interfaith and Contextual Literacy Training (Pelatihan Literasi Lintas Iman dan Teologi Kontekstual), Congregational training must move beyond doctrinal strengthening toward *interfaith understanding* and *contextual theology*. Such training equips members to engage in pluralistic settings with empathy and theological depth. Key components include: Interfaith literacy is to understanding other religions’ beliefs and social dynamics to foster dialogue, not for creating conflict. Contextual theology workshops is to helping congregants reinterpret the gospel through their own culture and daily experiences. Peace and tolerance modules: encouraging practical peacemaking and conflict transformation based on biblical principles. Cross-cultural evangelism skill-building: preparing members to communicate faith sensitively across cultural boundaries. Through these dimensions, evangelism becomes relational, transformative, and dialogical, rooted in cultural sensitivity and social responsibility. The contextual diaconal-dialogical model allows the gospel to be present not only in words but in living actions that promote peace, justice, and inclusivity within Indonesia’s plural society.

4. CONCLUSION

Evangelism in the Indonesian context faces a variety of complex internal and external challenges, especially in the cultural, social, and political fields. From a cultural perspective, the low understanding of contextual theology and the lack of the application of inculturation cause the gospel message to often not be fully accepted by the local community. In fact, the success of evangelism depends heavily on the ability to dialogue with the local culture without losing the essence of the Christian faith. Socially, internal fragmentation between denominations due to claims of doctrinal truth and narrow interpretive approaches is an obstacle to the unity of the people and the testimony of the church. On the external side, evangelism is often misunderstood as an attempt at apostasy, exacerbated by social pressures and prejudices from the majority group. This shows that sensitivities in pluralistic societies need to be addressed with a loving, open, and respectful approach to individual freedom. Meanwhile, from the political aspect, although state regulations guarantee freedom of religion, its implementation in the field still experiences deviations. Tolerance of intolerance and weak law enforcement create insecurity in carrying out evangelistic duties. The Church also tends to be passive and lacks synergy in utilizing the space of freedom that has been available for open and peaceful evangelistic missions.

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For this reason, a more contextual and structured evangelistic strategy is needed. Adaptive and inculturative approaches as well as congregational training are key in presenting the gospel in a relevant way in the midst of a pluralistic society. Evangelism not only conveys the message of salvation, but also serves as a means of building dialogue, strengthening faith, and embodying the love of Christ in broader social life.

UCAPAN TERIMA KASIH

The author wishes to extend sincere gratitude to several parties who have contributed to the completion of this work. First, to Lewi Kabanga for his careful review of the manuscript, including spelling and grammar corrections. Second, to P3M STAKPN-Sentani for facilitating the preparation and publication of this work through valuable suggestions and constructive critiques.

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