



# An Evaluation of Christian Education in Indonesia in light of Targum: A Cognitive Psychology Approach

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## Abstract

Education is an important matter in Indonesia and also globally. This importance of education is ingrained in the Indonesian Law Constitution in 1945 (Undang-Undang Dasar 1945), chapter 31 where it states that: every Indonesian citizen deserves to receive education, and is obliged to attend basic education and the government is obliged to pay for it. In addition, the government is to seek and organize a national education system which increases faith and piety as well as noble character in the context of educating the life of the nation, which is regulated by law. The state prioritizes the education budget of at least twenty percent of the state revenue and expenditure budget as well as from the regional revenue and expenditure budget to meet the needs of implementing national education. It also advances science and technology by supporting high religious values and national unity for the advancement of civilization and the welfare of mankind. As a result, the Indonesian government provides a free of charge education at public schools from grades one to nine to give an opportunity of equal education to every citizen which includes nine subjects. The challenge, however, is that all students in the public schools are required to take nine subjects every academic year. This could be overwhelmingly difficult for the students both academically and also mentally. Thus, this article attempts to propose a solution academically as to how students could cope with their forgetfulness to achieve the maximum grades. This solution, it is argued, can be discovered in the Targum and is tested through a cognitive psychology approach. Targums which form a part of the Jewish traditional literature from the Second Temple period are not merely a translation of the Hebrew Torah text into Aramaic, but also possess immense Talmudic wisdom that illuminates the Biblical stories but also provide us with important tried and tested lessons for today.

**Keyword:** Repetition, Educational Psychology, Cognitive Psychology, Christian Education, Targum, Indonesia.



## Introduction

Indonesian Law Constitution in 1945 (Undang-Undang Dasar 1945), chapter 31 describes the importance of education:

(1) Setiap warga negara berhak mendapat pendidikan; (2) Setiap warga negara wajib mengikuti pendidikan dasar dan pemerintah wajib membiayainya; (3) Pemerintah mengusahakan dan menyelenggarakan satu sistem pendidikan nasional, yang meningkatkan keimanan dan ketakwaan serta akhlak mulia dalam rangka mencerdaskan kehidupan bangsa, yang diatur dengan undang-undang. (4) Negara memprioritaskan anggaran pendidikan sekurang-kurangnya dua puluh persen dari anggaran pendapatan dan belanja negara serta dari anggaran pendapatan dan belanja daerah untuk memenuhi kebutuhan penyelenggaraan pendidikan nasional. (5) Pemerintah memajukan ilmu pengetahuan dan teknologi dengan menunjang tinggi nilai-nilai agama dan persatuan bangsa untuk kemajuan peradaban serta kesejahteraan umat manusia.

Translation:

(1) Verse one states that every Indonesian citizen deserves to receive education. (2) Verse two says that Every citizen is obliged to attend basic education and the government is obliged to pay for it. (3) Verse three communicates that the government seeks and organizes a national education system which increases faith and piety as well as noble character in the context of educating the life of the nation, which is regulated by law. (4) Verse four describes that the state prioritizes the education budget of at least twenty percent of the state revenue and expenditure budget as well as from the regional revenue and expenditure budget to meet the needs of implementing national education. (5) Verse five pictures that the government advances science and technology by supporting high religious values and national unity for the advancement of civilization and the welfare of mankind.

Therefore, to strengthen the quality of education in Indonesia, the government provides free of charge at public schools from grades one to nine or six years of elementary education and three years of secondary school (or middle school). In addition to a free education, Indonesian government established the curriculum of grades one to nine which includes nine subjects such as religious education, language (Indonesian and/or English), science, math, civic education, physical education, social studies, vocational skills, art, and culture. All students from grade 1 to 12 in the public schools are required to take all these nine subjects every academic year (Yuliantoro, 2016, 16). This curriculum, however, could overload the students because the plentifulness of subjects since they are six years old. Therefore, this brief article seeks to equip Christian educators in Indonesia to teach these many subjects effectively through *some principles* found in the Targum. Why does this topic apply these principles to Indonesia?

First, Indonesia is the fourth most populous country in the world with its cultural and ethnic diversity across the country. Despite of its large population, there are some educational problems such as less developed education programmes, low quality of teachers, and poor infrastructure. Kurniawan (2016) confirms these difficulties and proposes a better selection process and training for educators, as well as improvement of the curriculum, the administration, and the facilities. A criticism to Kurniawan's proposals is she has not discussed the methodology of education to improve the quality of the learning process. This research, therefore, focusses on how to improve



an education programme through some principles in the Targum as a learning process. Second, the author grew up in Indonesia. As a result, the author experienced some challenges in education in Indonesia that will be discussed in the section entitled 'Implication for Education in Indonesia' below. Therefore, this article argues for the effectiveness of repetition as a learning process to help students to retain the information longer and more accurately. This research uses the cognitive psychology approach to measure the effectiveness of repetition.

## Targum

The word targum comes from the Aramaic '*targem*' and means "to interpret, explain, or translate" or "to read aloud" in Akkadian. Targum or Targum Onkelos, as it is known, has a few meanings, First, it is a *memra* or an explanation of a Tannaic saying. Secondly it is a *derasha* or homiletic explanation on any matter. Thirdly, it is a translation specially during the reading of the Torah (Safrai, 2006:244). which is the primary Jewish Aramaic targum ("translation") of the Torah, and is accepted as an authoritative translated text of the Five Books of Moses in the Pentateuch. Targum is essentially an ancient Aramaic paraphrasing or interpretation of the Hebrew Bible, of a type made from about the 1st century CE when Hebrew began to cease to be used as a spoken language. Targum is not only a translation or a paraphrase of some part of the Old Testament Scripture into the Aramaic language, but also an authoritative interpretation as part of the Oral Torah (PesR 5:1 and TanB II Wayyera 6; Lasair, 2010: 265-287).

It is inferred that the Targum was given orally on Mount Sinai: "Write these words," that is Scripture that has been given in writing, "for by mouth of these words," that is Targum that has been given orally. The earliest of the Targums was dated from about the time after the Babylonian Exile (597 BCE-587BCE) when Aramaic had superseded Hebrew as the spoken language of the Jews in Palestine. The function of the Targum as a translation in synagogal liturgy was quite natural in times and places when and where Aramaic was a common language. Targum Onkelos and Targum Jonathan were used for the preparation of reading Scripture in the synagogue, for private and academic Bible study, and possibly also for language acquisition (Houtman & Sysling, 2009:35-39) to aid the student to pass over from his native language to Hebrew text (Alexander, 1988: 217-254). Therefore, Targum informs us that education should be taking in every place, and not merely be limited to the school setting.

Targum was included in the curriculum of the ancient academy before the Usha period (135 CE). Teaching Targum together with the Bible became a part of elementary Jewish education (Safrai, 2006: 249). There are two stages of this elementary level. After the first stage, children should be able to memorize Scripture as their rote learning portions of Scripture. In the second stage, the children should be able to construct and correlate carefully, as closely as possible, with the Hebrew text (York, 1979:74-86). Weekly public reading of the Hebrew Text and Aramaic Targum helps the memorization. As Rav Huna bar Judah says in the name of Rabbi Ammi om NT Ber 8ab (Houtman, 2014: 81-98):

A man should always complete his *parashiyot* [the term *parashah* (plural: *parashiyot*) means a section of biblical book in the Masoretic text of the Tanakh. In the Masoretic text, *parashah* sections are designated by various types of spacing between them, as found in Torah scrolls, scrolls of the book of *Neviim* or *Ketuvim*. The division of the text into *parashiyot* for the biblical books is independent of special names] together with the congregation, [reading] twice the Hebrew text and once more [Aramaic] Targum, and even [such verses as] *Atarot* and *Dibon* [the names of towns



in Number 32:3], for if one completes his *parashiyot* together with the congregation, his days and years are prolonged.

In summary, the Targum states that both children and adults, individual and community should be able to memorize and reconstruct with the Hebrew text as close as possible. Thus repetition is required in learning.

Targum Neofiti encourages the people of Israel to write all the words of Torah on the stones, written, engraved, and rightly explained, read, and translated in seventy languages (Macho 1968-1979: 7:11, 20). Thus, Targum Neofiti states that the information should be transferred to two senses of perception: sight and sound. In addition, the right education according to Targum Neofiti includes a good explanation. Unfortunately, some teachers enforce the information, but they do not explain it well (Ram & Irfan, 2018). They do not welcome questions from students, engage in discussion, and nurture the interaction. Limited interaction and discussion will prevent the effectiveness of learning process (Garrison & Anderson, 2003: 29-30). The understanding of the material will enhance the possibility of the information's retention. The last emphasis of education according to Targum Neofiti is translation. The information should be translated into seventy languages. In Christian education, we could apply this principle: translate the information into the languages that the students understand. In other words, a clear language in teaching will increase the effectiveness of learning process.

## Methodology

### *Cognitive Psychology*

Cognitive psychology is the branch of psychology devoted to the scientific study of the mind (Nick & Gellatly, 2012:3) and it is a study which is related to the human brain and memory. Based on cognitive psychology, there are three types of memory: sensory, short-term, and long-term memory (Chia, 2022).

Sensory memory is the shortest-term element of memory. It is the ability to retain impressions of sensory information after the original stimuli have ended. It acts as a kind of buffer for stimuli received through the five senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch, which are retained accurately, but very briefly. Sensory memory is an ultra-short-term memory and decays or degrades very quickly, typically in the region of 200 - 500 milliseconds (1/5 - 1/2 second) after the perception of an item, and certainly less than a second (although echoic memory is now thought to last a little longer, up to perhaps three or four seconds) (Solso, 2001: 204).

Short-term memory acts as a kind of "scratch-pad" for temporary recall of the information, which is being processed at any point in time, and has been referred to as "the brain's post-it note". It can be thought of as the ability to remember and process information at the same time. It holds a small amount of information (typically around 7 items or even less) in mind in an active, readily available state for a short period of time typically from 10 to 15 seconds, or sometimes up to a minute (Solso, 2001: 284).

Long term memory, on the other hand, is the ability to store more information for long periods of time/unlimited duration. Long term memory is often divided into two further main types: explicit (declarative) memory and implicit (procedural) memory. Implicit (procedural) memory is a skill memory such as a piano skill or cutting skill. Explicit (declarative) memory is memory of facts and events. This memory is sometimes called as explicit memory because it consists of information that is explicitly stored and retrieved (Solso, 2001: 284; Chia, 2020).



## **Evaluation of the education in Targum from cognitive psychology**

Targum (also Targum Onkelos - which is the primary Jewish Aramaic targum "translation" of the Torah, and is an authoritative translated text of the Five Books of Moses in the Pentateuch) emphasizes on the importance of repetition. Kang (2016) discovered that repetition enhances memory and transfer of learning to new contexts. Hintzman (2010) demonstrated the effectiveness of repetition to improve performance in memorization. Tagliabue (2020) also proves the effectiveness of repetition to enhance the memory of older adults. Repetition itself, nevertheless, is not sufficient to obtain the most result because mechanical memorization is not the best method to develop memory (Chia, 2022). Therefore, modern mnemonic devices are important such as duolingo, quizlet, flashcard practice, and games (Pashler et al., 2007:187–193; Schnorr et al., 2016: 41–54, Chia 2022).

In addition to repetition, the other principle of education in Targum is the place of education. It means that an effective education should be taking in any setting and in every place, and not only be limited to the school setting. Chia's research (2022) demonstrates the effectiveness of learning process could be enhanced if education is taught both in public and home.

The last principle is derived from Targum Neofiti which reminds us of the importance of understanding and explanation in memory retention. Story, discussion, and interaction are important tools to increase the understanding of the students. Normally, the students retrieve information well that is used in discussion and interaction (Chia, 2020). In addition, Goff and Roediger's experiment (2000) show that story typically promote accuracy of memories. Although the inner core of the gist cannot be changed at all, the story requires some continuity and flexibility (Bailey, 1991). In other words, memory for central details looks to be relatively strong, while memory for peripheral details appears to be relatively weak (Burke et al., 1991:542-579). Then, how were the Jews able to retain the information accurately including peripheral detail? Apparently, the Jews used an integrative education method. Targum denotes that the Jews integrated their learning process both in public and home repeatedly. In addition to storytelling, Maxwell's research (2012) points out the importance of understanding or explanation because it influences human's actions. As Hilary Putman (1999), the philosopher, says that the world is filled with causes and effects. Thus, causal explanation is fundamentally important to identify the actual processes that resulted in a specific outcome in a particular context (Sayer, 1992; Pawson & Tiley, 1997; Little, 2010). Discussion also plays an important role to the effectiveness of learning process. As Xie, Durrington, and Yen (2011) prove that the facilitation of online discussion extends collaborative knowledge construction and information distribution, as well as supporting cognitive and metacognitive engagement of reasoning and argumentation.

Garrison and Anderson (2003: 29-30) also highlight three important aspects in education: cognitive, social, and teaching presence. Cognitive presence is the extent to which the participants in any configuration of a community of inquiry can construct meaning through sustained communication. Essentially, cognitive presence is a condition of higher order thinking and learning. The primary focus on cognitive presences is to ensure that discussion and dialogue includes learning exercises that foster critical thinking. Social presence is the ability of learners to project their personal characteristics into the community of inquiry by presenting themselves as "real people." Social presence supports cognitive objectives through its ability to instigate, sustain, and support critical thinking in discussion forums (Garrison & Anderson, 2003). Teaching presence is defined as the design, facilitation, and direction of cognitive and social processes for the purpose of realizing personally meaningful and educationally worthwhile learning outcomes. The teacher brings all the aspects of the learning process together to meet the learning outcomes





and the respective needs of the learner. The role of the teacher is critical in generating and facilitating discussion by structuring appropriate discussion guidelines to ensure student engagement and learning. This is often the most difficult task in developing an online course, but with intentional course mapping based on the course learning outcomes, the teacher can ensure quality in discussions forums.

### **Implication for Education in Indonesia**

Indonesia is the fourth most populous country in the world with its cultural and ethnic diversity across the country. Despite its diversity, Indonesia fights for the equality of its citizens to experience a good education. This spirit of an equal education is formulated in Indonesia's Law (Undang-Undang No 20. Tahun, 2003), where it states that the education in Indonesia is considered as a conscious and planned effort to attain a good atmosphere of learning process to develop the students in their spirituality, character, and skills that will be useful for themselves, community, and their country. Therefore, the Indonesian government provides free of charge education at public schools from grades one to nine or six years of elementary education and three years of secondary school. Indonesia established the curriculum of grades one to nine that incorporate nine subjects such as religious education, language (Indonesian and/or English and/or Chinese language), science, math, civic education, physical education, social studies, vocational skills, art, and culture. All these subjects are meant to build the spirituality, character, and skills of the students. The question is how Christian educators could help the students to achieve these purposes without having too much pressure on the heavily loaded curriculum?

As it is mentioned above, all Indonesian students are required to study nine subjects since their elementary education. This curriculum, however, could overload the students. This brief article attempts to assist Indonesian students to learn these many subjects effectively by learning some principles as they are defined in Targum. Cognitive psychology reveals the effectiveness of repetition to retain the information just as it is stated in Targum. This effectiveness, however, is not solely on repetition. Christian educators should work together with the parents so that this education can occur both in the school and at home (Chia, 2022). Targum has reiterated that the educators are both teachers (priests and prophets) and parents. The repetition should be expanded to the home as well. Nowadays, repetition should be combined with mnemonic devices. Rohwer's experiment (1987) validates that the mnemonic devices can enhance learning and the adeptness of student remembering. Therefore, they play a critical role in study effectiveness (p. 19; cf. Brown et al., 1983:77-176, Pressley et al., 1982:61-91, Belleza, 1996: 345-380, McCabe et al., 2013:183-192). For example, Belleza (1981) performed an experiment: 150 nouns were presented once at the rate one every fifteen seconds with mnemonic device (peg-word).

The result is fascinating because the students were able to remember 87% of the words or 130 of the 150 words presented (pp. 247-275). In addition, Research demonstrates that music enhances a cognitive performance (Hallam et al., 2002:111-122, Särkämö et al., 2008: 866-876, Miller, 2017: 3-15). Then, educators should teach based on spaced repetition as it is demonstrated by Kang's experiment. Targum also informs us of the importance of understanding and discussion with the combination of induction (bottom-up reasoning) and deduction (top-down thinking) to enhance the effectiveness of the learning process. Using discussion will ensure children's confidence as well (Vesely, Bloom & Sherlock, 2007). Therefore, to achieve the maximum results of learning process, Christian educators should consider using repetition, the cooperation of teachers and parents, and understanding or interaction on this is vital.

Since Indonesia is the largest Muslim country in the world, I will utilize Islam' education to represent Indonesian education. Berglund et al argues that all Muslim schools' function in the



same way, that the teaching of Islam would be very much the same in all schools, and that Islam is simply “transmitted” from the older generation to the younger without adaptation to the place and context in questions (Berglund, Shanneik, & Bocking, 2016:110). This education is similar to Jewish education and more especially during the Old Testament era, the kingdom-captivity era, and the post-Babylonian exile (Chia, 2022). *Hafalan (Muhafadzah)* method or memorization in English is commonly utilized and ingrained in both secular and religious schools. The students, since their early age, need to memorize some portions of the Holy Scriptures and recite them before their teachers or *ustadz*. Memorization is the heart of Indonesian education. The teachers or *ustadz* also plays an important role in education as was the case in Jewish education. Sorogan method is a method that the teacher uses to develop his students by spending time with them. This method emphasizes the role of *ustadz*. The students will see and learn from *ustadz*’ daily life. They will listen and imitate their teacher’ teaching every day. *Ustadz* and his students will also need to have a close relationship (Berglund, Shanneik & Bocking, 2016:110).

The evaluation of this methodology is the endurance of the students who are expected to commence their classes at 7:00 am and end at 4:00 pm every day. Nine hours of school per day is not very efficient according to Agustang, Mutiara, and Asrifan (2021). The tiredness students experience and their lack of focus due to long hours of being in school will prevent the effectiveness of a repetition approach in learning. Therefore, further research should be undertaken to measure the effectiveness of repetition in the midst of tiredness and lack of focus.

## Conclusions

Targum sheds some lights to Christian education in Indonesia. Despite the various and many subjects been taught to all students from grade 1 to 12 in the public schools, Targum encourages the collaboration of the teachers and the parents to ensure the education could be retained. Second, repetition is an important method to enhance memory retention, although this method will take time. The last principle from Targum is the importance of understanding and explanation in learning processes. These principles could possibly help the students to develop their spirituality, character, and skills. The Targum had its place in the synagogal liturgy and in Biblical instruction and can add value for us today.

Research in cognitive psychology has proved that the principles in Targum could improve the effectiveness of the learning process. Targum reveals that both teachers and parents are responsible and should work together on the spirituality, character, and skills of the students. The training and the education of students should be practiced both in public and at home repeatedly to ensure its effectiveness. Lastly, teaching one way or having a monologue is not as effective as two ways or having a dialogue. In other words, explanations, interactions, and discussions will improve the effectiveness of the learning process. Therefore, the principles as expressed in Targum could be used on regular basis to ensure the effectiveness of learning process. The reading and memorization skills acquired using the Targum as an example, are seemingly essential for study and could add value to education in Indonesia. A great deal can be learned from the Targum about life centuries ago and specifically about the plight of Jewish communities, but also how we can to an extent do things today.

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