

# Frank Laubach and the Adult Literacy Campaign in South Korea in the 1950s–1960s

Sung-Sang YOO, Rebekah Hwajhin LEE, and Da-Jung JUNG

## Abstract

*This study traces the history and contribution of the Korean Christian Literacy Association (KCLA) to literacy expansion in South Korea from liberation in 1945 to the 1960s. There are critical gaps in the data and analysis concerning the role of civil society organizations (CSO), and especially religious-based organizations, in South Korea's literacy expansion. This study examines data and documents on one CSO—the KCLA—and the extent to which it was influenced by the American missionary Frank Laubach. Laubach and his team's one-month visit to South Korea through the arrangement of American Protestant missionaries was the beginning of the KCLA. Through the support of foreign missionaries, their connections with the United States Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK), the South Korean government, and funding sources overseas, South Korean Christian leaders took the Laubach method and Laubach's teaching materials, such as the Hangeul cheotgeoleum (Korean Primer) and the Story of Jesus, and conducted an adult literacy campaign through literacy classes, reading classes, and Readers' Clubs. While the number of enrollments, publications, and the outcome of these activities are not yet clearly verifiable, it is evident that the activities of the KCLA, through connections with Frank Laubach, foreign missionaries, and foreign funding sources, significantly contributed to adult literacy education in South Korea.*

**Keywords:** adult literacy, civil society organization, religious organization, Frank Laubach, Korean Christian Literacy Association (KCLA), *Hangeul cheotgeoleum*, Story of Jesus

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While this study was previously published in Korean in *Gyoyukhak yeongu* (Yoo, Jung, and Lee 2016) with a similar title, the journal approved its re-publication in another language along with major revisions and modifications regarding Laubach's contributions to literacy campaigns in the 1940s.

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## Introduction

Korea's literacy rate, estimated at 20 percent at the time of Korea's liberation in 1945, experienced an astonishing increase to 58.7 percent by 1948 and the formal establishment of the South Korean government, 74.4 percent at the end of the Korean War in 1953, and 95.9 percent by 1958, the final year of the five-year National Illiteracy Eradication Campaign (Yoon 1990; Kang 2014).<sup>1</sup> Even if one replaces the unbelievable 4.1 percent illiteracy rate with other non-government surveys around 1959 that measured illiteracy between 21 and 28 percent (Byun et al. 2012), this would still be dramatic progress. What accounts for such dramatic progress in literacy during this period of national disaster and instability? There is considerable data and interest in literacy expansion campaigns by the South Korean government, Joseon Language Society (*Joseon eohakhoe*; later the Korean Language Society), and other private organizations. The national plan to provide compulsory primary education (the six-year plan between 1953 and 1959), and the five-year Illiteracy Eradication Campaign are often cited as decisive factors in this literacy success (Yoon 1990). But relatively few studies have compiled, organized, and analyzed the activities of civil society organizations (CSOs), especially those of Christian missionary organizations and their literacy teaching methods, curriculum development, and teacher training. Among these organizations, the *Korean Christian Literacy Association (KCLA)* is distinct from other adult literacy education organizations initiated in Korea at this period, given its financial support from and connections with American missionaries.

*Frank Laubach* (1884–1970) was one American missionary who contributed to the early literacy campaigns in Korea. A study of Laubach's missionary visit to Korea and his impact on South Korean literacy would

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1. The literacy rate at the time of Korean liberation remains in dispute. According to the Ministry of Education (1998), by 1945, 79 percent of the population over age 13 had never been enrolled in primary school, which was taken as a proxy measure for literacy. It is also unclear whether literacy at that time was estimated based on Korean or Japanese language. For more on the ambiguity of the Korean literacy rate from 1945 to the 1960s and issues of measurement, see Kim and Yoo (2001) and Yoo, Jung, and Lee (2016).

contribute to the history of the nation's literacy development activities by Christian CSOs. The fact that the 1949 edition of *Hangeul cheotgeoleum* (Korean Primer) was authored by *Frank Laubach* became the initial point of interest that motivated this study. This study found that as a Christian missionary and literacy educator, Laubach had contributed to the development of organizations such as the Christian Literature Society of Korea (CLSK) and the *KCLA*.

Since Laubach first began to expand his pedagogical work beyond the Philippines in 1935, Laubach's literacy method had become widely distributed around the world as a primary literacy teaching tool. Yet specific data on *Frank Laubach* is not currently available in South Korea. To shed more light on this instrumental figure, the authors combed his personal records, official data from the organizations for which he worked, and documents Laubach accumulated over his career from various countries and today comprising the Laubach Literacy International Records in the Special Collections Research Center of Syracuse University Library in the United States. This study is mainly based on data collected in June 2015 from Syracuse University Library, as well as from the historical records of the Christian mission in South Korea. However, there are undeniable limitations in reconstructing the circumstances of Korean literacy education as a part of the Christian mission. After Korea's liberation in 1945, missionary records came to be curated by various entities and in fragmented pieces, records that have yet to be categorized for sources related to adult literacy education. What's more, with the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950 the earliest records of the *KCLA* were incinerated in a fire.

Therefore, this study aims to reconstruct the history of adult literacy education in South Korea between the time of Korea's liberation and the 1960s, focusing on one civil society organization, the *KCLA*. Along with a review of *Frank Laubach's* literacy methods, the literacy expansion activities of the *KCLA* supported by Laubach's literacy campaigns and support will be examined to draw some implications of this study for adult literacy education in Korea.

## **Frank Laubach's Adult Literacy Education**

### *Laubach's Early Years*

The story of *Frank Laubach's* missionary work in the Philippines explains how the Laubach literacy method was developed. As a certified teacher and a Christian missionary of the Union Congregational Church, *Frank Laubach* was sent to the Philippines in 1915 (Ellison 1954). Laubach's biographer Karen R. Norton divides Laubach's literacy work into three periods—the Lanao period from 1929 to 1941, the India period from 1935 to 1953, and his later years in the United States from 1955 to 1970 (Norton 1990b). It was during this “India period” that Laubach visited several countries in Asia, including Korea in 1949.

Laubach's literacy work started in 1929 when he was sent to Lanao, Philippines to start a teacher's college (Norton 1990b). Laubach recounts the beginning of his work with Lanao's Moro people in several publications (F. Laubach and R. Laubach 1960; F. Laubach 1970). The Moros were the “Moors” of the Philippines, the Muslim community in the Lanao Province of Mindanao. Laubach and his Filipino colleague Donato Galia encountered initial trials and errors in literacy teaching there, implementing various methods using songs and narratives (F. Laubach 1970; Norton 1990b).

Laubach's choice of language, script, and reading materials are noteworthy. In *Toward a Literate World* (1938), Laubach narrates some of his previous experiments. His attempt at teaching English was generally unsuccessful, while teaching Arabic was disapproved by the US territorial government, as well as deemed too difficult to teach or print as reading material. Thus, the local Maranao language was ideal (Norton 1990b, 48–49). Laubach personally recounted his approach to the Moros during this time as a kind of conversion. He attributed his initial breakthrough to an inspiration during prayer when he realized his failure was due to his lack of love for the people and his Western sense of superiority. Inspired by the idea, “If you want the Moros to be fair to your religion, be fair to theirs. Study the Koran [Quran] with them” (F. Laubach 1970, 26), Laubach approached the village religious leaders to study the Quran. In the process he was able to

form a rapport as well as learn the Maranao language for himself.

With Galia (who was trained at Columbia Teachers College) as his native colleague, Laubach learned the Maranao language and decided to use the Roman alphabet to most effectively incorporate the Moros into the majority Christian Philippine Islands. Lessons based on phonics were designed to help adults acquire basic literacy in five lessons (Norton 1990b, 5). The team also preferred to produce literature of controlled quality and content. They produced word charts, newsletters, and reading materials based on passages in the Quran and traditional epic poems.

The work in Lanao progressed smoothly with positive responses from the Moros, according to Laubach's letters to his father in 1930 and 1931 (F. Laubach 1970, 30–34). But when news came that more than 50 percent of the financial support from churches in the United States would be cut, the team was forced to lay off half of the Lanao staff and reduce the salaries of others, considerably slowing down the literacy program. But a Moro chief who was determined to continue the literacy campaign notably declared, "I'll make everybody who knows how to read teach somebody else, or I'll kill him" (F. Laubach 1970, 44). This was how Laubach's "Each One Teach One" campaign started, naturally modified from the original "teach or die" (F. Laubach 1970, 44).

By 1935 the news of the "Philippine method" spread to other countries, and Laubach launched trips to Asia, Africa, and Latin America with diverse combinations of teams, but most extensively to India (F. Laubach and R. Laubach 1960, 8). *Frank Laubach* toured 104 countries throughout his life, preparing lessons and primers in local languages and dialects and working with various CSOs, international organizations, and government institutions (Norton 1990b). In 1946, Laubach reported a literacy survey to UNESCO, "Adult Literacy and Social Reconstruction" (Norton 1990a, 27), and consulted the chief of its Adult Education Division to start a literacy campaign in Thailand (F. Laubach 1949b). Laubach also worked extensively with the US government since endorsing Harry Truman's Point IV Program for technical assistance to developing countries (Missions Public Relations 1946; Laubach 1970, 250, 258).

### *Characteristics of the Laubach Method*

Laubach's literacy method had distinct characteristics. These can be categorized into foundational principles, teaching and learning methodologies, and organizational structure. The literacy teaching method and the campaign's organizational structure stem from the basic principle of evangelical volunteerism.

#### 1) Foundational Principles—Each one Teach One (and Win One for Christ)

The first key founding principle was volunteerism. This spirit of volunteerism was summarized in the foundational phrase “Each One Teach One,” the idea that started when financial aid was cut in the Philippines and the organization could no longer support professional teachers. In this sense, the Indian educator R.B. Manikam characterized the Laubach method as the “Laubach spirit” rather than method (as cited in Norton 1990b, 9). The spirit of the literacy campaign was that of other-orientated self-sacrifice or the “spirit of mutual aid set free” (Norton 1990b, 10). This was evident in the organization of Laubach literacy programs emphasizing volunteerism and local ownership in which the specific goals of local organizations were determined by the local members according to the given cultural and historical context (Norton 1990b, 4–5).

Another prominent principle was evangelism. Here, “evangelical” can be viewed in both the narrow religious sense in which Laubach as a Christian missionary sought to promulgate his beliefs, and in the wider sense of zeal to spread one's ideology, whether religious or secular. In some literacy readers the explicitly religious foundational principle is articulated as “Each One Teach One and Win One for Christ” (Christoph 2009, 89), where literacy teaching could function as a gateway to Christian evangelism. This organizational purpose determined much of the reading material content as either religious or somewhat moralistic in nature. Laubach's *Story of Jesus* was an early primer designed to be used in exactly this way (Christoph 2009). At the same time, as in Lanao, Philippines, Laubach's numerous collaborations with governments and secular organizations do not contain

Christian evangelical content. But Christoph maintains that even without explicit religious language, the evangelical zeal is apparent within Each One Teach One's "censorial attitude" (Christoph 2009, 93). Laubach's control of the reading content, as well as the missionary zeal with which the volunteers were to teach literacy purely out of charity and goodwill, reflects Laubach's identity as a missionary.

Laubach's evangelicalism had other varying facets. In one sense, literacy was promoted as a tool for social empowerment. Laubach considered literacy education critical for lifting people up, not only from financial poverty but also from a sense of inferiority and victimhood. In *Forty Years with the Silent Billion*, Laubach tells of an encounter with Mahatma Gandhi in 1935 in which Gandhi questioned whether the people even ought to become literate, considering other more urgent needs of basic survival. Given the perverse content in much of the reading materials available, would it not be better for people to avoid such exposure at all? Laubach answered Gandhi. Laubach's response indicates that he considered literacy teaching not only as a form of aid, but a way to build local capacity to escape unjust social situations.

The right way to lift the masses above hunger is to teach them to lift themselves. Your illiterates have been the victims of educated scoundrels who have kept them in debt all their lives. Literacy is the only road I see to their complete emancipation. (F. Laubach 1970, 21–22)

The same evangelical zeal manifested itself as anti-communism when addressing the Western audience. At the height of Cold War Laubach appealed to donors' charitable impulses and their fear of a global communist outbreak by proposing literacy teaching as a solution. He wrote urgently of the need to teach literacy to those of developing countries and save them before they sided with the Communists (F. Laubach 1951, 70). This is perhaps the other side of that missionary zeal—a sort of call to arms against the perceived ultimate evil and to extend salvation. In this case it was the fight against communism to *win the hearts* of the poor and have them favor the United States. Literacy teaching was to be in the service of this greater cause.

## 2) Teaching and Learning Methodologies—Phonics for Adults

Based on the above principles, Laubach disseminated his literacy teaching method. Adult literacy campaigns had to reflect the realities of the developing countries, and for *Frank Laubach* this meant the lessons must be easy to learn for adults who already spoke the language (Norton 1990b, 41). In Lanao, sound-symbol relationships were taught using keyword charts, while picture chain charts or hieroglyphic charts with mnemonic device were developed to teach Hindi in India. The lessons were then designed to have learners decipher all the phonics of the language first, instead of relying on word memory, which would complete literacy training in the first five lessons. The success factor of the fully formed “Laubach system” was attributed to connecting “the sound, the word, and what the word stands for,” which the adults already know, with the new literacy symbols, through pictorial representations (Winfield 1957). The phonics method failed with children but was successful with adults who could reason out the sounds. The next crucial task was to continue to provide easy reading materials containing traditional stories, religious texts, and subjects of general health, as well as locally produced newsletters (Norton 1990b, 17).

Laubach noted that this was in contrast to S.D. Daniel’s “life-centric method” for literacy applied to Tamil speakers in India that would have taken learners a few months to two years to learn the language (Norton 1990b, 123). Laubach admitted Daniel’s method had merit for those who could afford regular schooling and instructional time, but for adults on a different timeline, the best approach was to concentrate on phonetics in the first fifteen minutes of the lesson (Norton 1990b).

The lessons were also designed for ease of instruction. Based on the principle of volunteerism, and given the lack of trained teachers and the meager finances to employ them, Laubach’s literacy method relied on volunteer teachers. The teachers were trained on the exact words and gestures to use during instruction, eliminating any extraneous words (F. Laubach and R. Laubach 1960, 21–24). Thus, pedagogical training was kept at a minimum, while much emphasis was instead placed on training the volunteer teacher’s attitude toward his or her fellow adults. Teachers were

taught to treat learners as equals, to never discourage them with negative reinforcement, and to love the learners and eventually inspire them to help others in return (F. Laubach and R. Laubach 1960, 35–37).

### 3) Organizational Structure—Global and Local Partnerships

The third characteristic of Laubach's literacy campaign was Laubach's extensive partnerships with global, national, and local partners for both funding and field work. *Frank Laubach's* prolific work with diverse organizations is too extensive for one study, but a brief description of the organizations, actors, and funding channels is necessary to provide a concrete notion of the scope of Laubach's literacy work both in the US and internationally.

Laubach's literacy campaigns partnered with both official sectors and civil society while also establishing numerous organizational bodies. Under the Congregational Mission Board and the National Council of Churches, Laubach founded religious literacy committees—the World Literacy Committee (1935) and the Committee on World Literacy and Christian Literature (1941). With increased involvement with the public sector, he started World Literacy, Inc. (1950) for nonreligious clients. After retirement from his post at the religious institution he continued establishing non-religious literacy and fundraising organizations, such as Laubach Literacy, Inc. This last organization exists today as ProLiteracy International, based in Syracuse, New York. On the official level, Laubach worked with the US Technical Cooperation Administration, United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and the Peace Corps.

Partnerships on the local level were at first largely with religious organizations, established with his missionary background, but also with local officials and village leaderships as at Lanao, Philippines. Local staff were hired to mobilize and coordinate volunteers and produce reading materials. The volunteer network became learning groups and reading groups.

Funding was a major reason for extensive partnerships. Laubach Literacy, Inc. *Manual of Operations* for overseas project personnel names two main objectives of organization—adult literacy worker training and

literacy material preparations. To finance these tasks, State Coordinating Committees and Companies of Compassion reaching out to individuals, churches and civic groups, mobilized funds and coordinated connections within the United States (Laubach Literacy, Inc., n.d., 5). The manual suggests soliciting assistance from organizations such as CARE, United States Information Service (USIS), USAID, UNESCO, the Peace Corps, the Ford Foundation, and other foundations, companies, and universities. Public Law 480 is also cited as the legal backing to securing support for literacy programs.

Laubach balanced domestic and international literacy campaigns, and by the 1959–1960 budget year, the Laubach Literacy Fund spent approximately equal amounts on projects in the United States (US\$41,824.76) and abroad (US\$41,234.00) (Laubach Literacy Fund 1950–1960). For international projects, literacy center operations and support for personnel accounted for most expenditures, with the remainder spent on books and other resources.

### **Laubach's Visit to South Korea and the KCLA**

The characteristics of Laubach's literacy campaigns are evident in his visit to South Korea, the establishment of the *KCLA*, and that association's literacy campaigns. This section highlights key events and examines the outcome in terms of the period's national literacy rate.

#### *Laubach's Visit*

*Frank Laubach* and his team was invited to Korea for one month in June 1949 as a denominational union project under the National Christian Council in Korea (NCCCK, later National Council of Churches in Korea) (Rhodes and Campbell 1964; Clark 1961). The objective in this short time span was to introduce the Laubach literacy method for a national adult education campaign in Korea. Laubach was accompanied by his son Robert S. Laubach, who co-wrote the *Far East News Letter* that recorded their visit to Korea. A

“Mr. and Mrs. Phil Gray” also accompanied them to produce illustrations for primers and charts (F. Laubach and R. Laubach 1960, 327–328).

While the Korean and American churches officially invited Laubach’s team, the visit was also anticipated by both Korean political leadership and the US Embassy. The South Korean Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs co-hosted an event to welcome Laubach’s team.<sup>2</sup> Mabel Genso, a missionary with the Presbyterian Church in the United States (PCUSA) who guided the team, and who later worked as a liaison between Laubach and the *KCLA*, also had connections with the US ambassador, who arranged for Laubach to meet President Rhee Syngman (F. Laubach and R. Laubach 1949). Working with a few Korean counterparts, Laubach finished the first 60-page primer *Hangeul cheotgeoleum* (1949) in six days, and 1100 copies were printed by the USIS for immediate use (F. Laubach and R. Laubach 1949). Key figures in the USIS had close familial ties with American missionaries, which expedited the cooperation with the US embassy.

Laubach’s main activities in Korea were to meet with national and church leaders, teach, demonstrate the Laubach method through literacy conferences, and encourage the production of reading materials. Laubach held literacy conferences in Seoul, Cheongju, and Daegu with “Mr. Yun” (likely Yoon Ha Yung) to guide Laubach’s team (F. Laubach and R. Laubach 1949). The Seoul conference was attended by 150 educated delegates who first tried learning from Laubach’s *Hangeul cheotgeoleum* for themselves, then practiced teaching others (F. Laubach and R. Laubach 1949). The delegates also produced 80 more articles to serve as second-level reading materials and posted them as “wall newspapers” at the conference. Laubach also visited universities to mobilize students to produce more reading materials. Severance Medical College and Nurses’ Training Schools each sent 30 articles on health subjects, while Ewha Womans College students sent 150 articles (F. Laubach and R. Laubach 1949).

Laubach conducted similar training sessions at conferences in Cheongju and Daegu. At the conference at Chongju Presbyterian Mission’s

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2. *Dong-A Ilbo*, June 4, 1949.

Bible School the delegates were first trained with the teaching method, and then non-literate adults were brought in to be taught by the delegates. In his depiction, Robert Laubach describes delegates crouching on the floor of the church with heads in their primers (F. Laubach and R. Laubach 1949). Similarly, at Daegu's First Presbyterian Church, 100 delegates taught 100 other non-literate persons, mostly elderly women. Ninety-eight participants were given diplomas for completing the lessons and acquiring literacy (F. Laubach and R. Laubach 1949).

Laubach recorded his impressions of Korea and its state of literacy, writing that the Korean language was "tied to the apron strings of China," Difficult Sinographs were considered more "scholarly and aristocratic," and so were often used in literature. Laubach appealed for Koreans to become independent of Chinese characters and use the "scientific" and phonetic Korean alphabet (*Hangeul*). He directly appealed to the Minister of Education and President Rhee for the expanded use of the Korean alphabet (F. Laubach and R. Laubach 1949).

Laubach also saw that a main challenge to Korean literacy to be the shortage of easy Korean-language reading materials. While he was told that 50 percent of Koreans were already literate, they still could not read newspapers, books, and magazines because of their wide use of Chinese characters (F. Laubach and R. Laubach 1949). Therefore, the production of Korean language-only literature was a priority. Besides the first two primers, two additional second-level books were produced by Ewha Womans College and Choseon Christian College (F. Laubach and R. Laubach 1949). Laubach's own *Story of Jesus* would later be published and disseminated in the Korean language. Laubach reported that by August 1949 the USIS was printing 50,000 copies of Laubach's *Hangeul cheotgeoleum* (F. Laubach and R. Laubach 1949).

As a Protestant missionary, Laubach's ultimate purpose was evangelism in Korea. He reports on training theology students to "Teach One and Win One," a variation of "Each One Teach One and Win One for Christ," using supplementary teaching material to accompany the primer.

In Korea we decided to print a little book of 17 pages (one page for each lesson in the first Primer) to tell the Christian just what to say at the end

of each lesson to bring the non-Christian students to a surrender to Jesus Christ. In three different cities we got theological students at work on “Teach One and Win One.” (F. Laubach and R. Laubach 1949)

As one can gather from the above quote, Laubach’s literacy campaign encouraged Christian volunteers to incorporate supplementary evangelical texts, in addition to religious reading materials such as his *Story of Jesus*, into their use of general primers and readers.

### *Adult Literacy Campaign by the KCLA*

The impact of Laubach’s visit to Korea can be understood in relation to Korea’s literacy rate during this period and the country’s Protestant church networks. The time and setting proved conducive to implementing Laubach’s literacy method given the US’s political and religious leadership and Korea’s own initiatives for education.

#### 1) Beginnings of the *KCLA*

By the time *Frank Laubach* and his party arrived in South Korea in 1949 the country had considerably high literacy rate as well as a number of religious reading materials in print. As mentioned earlier, statistics on the Korean illiteracy rate upon liberation are contradictory. Korean sources estimate about a 77 percent illiteracy rate in 1945, which then fell to around 42 percent by 1948 (Kim and Yoo 2001, 63–65; Yoon 1990, 120). Additionally, historical Korean church records by the PCUSA cite some anecdotal statistics for the period; Mabel Genso estimated a 50 percent illiteracy by around 1948, down from a previous survey of 70 percent (Rhodes and Campbell 1964, 352). The Presbyterian Mission in the USA’s Korea Mission historical record edited by Rhodes and Campbell (1964, 393–394) estimates that before the Korean War, Catholic and Protestant Christians made up 2 percent of the North and South Korean population. Genso estimated that among Christians, only about 25 percent in the “Korean Church” were illiterate (Rhodes and Campbell 1964, 352). American authors attribute

the low rate of general illiteracy to the simple phonetic alphabet of the Korean language and the widespread public and private school systems set up during the Japanese colonial period (1910–1945). High literacy in the Korean Church is attributed to foreign missionaries' early focus on education and their emphasis on Bible study (Rhodes and Campbell 1964, 353). What is certain is that by the time Laubach visited in 1949, religious civil society networks that already valued reading and publishing were well established in Korea and ready to adopt Laubach's literacy method.

Literature publication by the *KCLA* may be understood in the context of the general and religious publications already produced by foreign missionaries and the CLSK. In fact, the *KCLA* and CLSK closely cooperated from their inceptions until they merged in the 1960s. In August 1948, CLSK became an officially government-accredited foundation. In June 1949, the *KCLA* was established in CLSK offices upon Laubach's visit. With the outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950, the CLSK building caught fire, destroying much of the records and literature of the *KCLA*. A temporary CLSK and *KCLA* headquarters was set up in Busan to continue literature publication throughout the war with the printing done in Japan and in the United States. By July 1953, CLSK had been printing "reading material for the Korean Army and war wounded; magazine, 'The Children's Friend'; and forty books of different titles, 420,000 copies in all" (Rhodes and Campbell 1964, 256). In September 1953, the CLSK returned to its reconstructed building in Seoul and Allen D. Clark, a member of the Executive Committee and Editorial Board of the CLSK, resumed publishing activities. Clark also organized the *KCLA* to resume the literacy work started by Laubach before the war (Clark 1961).

The overlap of persons in public and religious leadership roles, and connections with the American government and churches were also critical for fundraising overseas. Among the early leaders of the *KCLA*, the two most immediately involved in literacy operations were Mabel Genso and Yoon Ha Young, who had guided *Frank Laubach's* team around Korea in 1949. By 1949, Mabel Genso had already been in Korea as a Presbyterian missionary a long time.<sup>3</sup> In 1954, she returned for a year as the liaison for

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3. Refer to the UCLA Online Archive Korean Christianity (Website).

Laubach's Committee on World Literacy. She conducted literacy projects at a government shelter outside Seoul, and brought in US\$1,000 of PCUSA funding for literacy campaigns in 1953 and 1954 (Rhodes and Campbell 1964, 354). Yoon Ha Young, pastor and a former provincial governor, was the first General Secretary of the *KCLA* (Rhodes and Campbell 1964). Yoon fled to Japan at the outbreak of the Korean War, then returned in 1954 with translations of the *Story of Jesus*, 10,000 primers, and 50 teaching charts (Rhodes and Campbell 1964, 353).

Besides Genso and Yoon, most of the founding members of the *KCLA* were elites in both Korean religious and the educational spheres, and included the presidents of Seoul National University and Severance Medical School (Shin 2013, 96). Through connections with foreign missionaries these Korean elites determined the direction of the *KCLA*.

## 2) Activities and Characteristics of the *KCLA*

Much of the information in this study on the *KCLA*'s activities derive from the *KCLA Information Bulletin*, hand-drawn and laminated around 1966. It articulates the "Aims of the Association" as—"1) teaching illiterates, 2) evangelical movement through the encouragement of book-reading, and 3) helping people improve their living standards" (*KCLA* n.d.). Shin (2013) also cites the purpose of the *KCLA* as teaching the Korean language to those 15 years or older who had not received schooling. The purpose of their education was to allow them to read and acquire a habit of reading. The *KCLA*'s general aim was to encourage people to read the Bible and other "wholesome" material to have them become "good Christian citizens" (Shin 2013, 96).

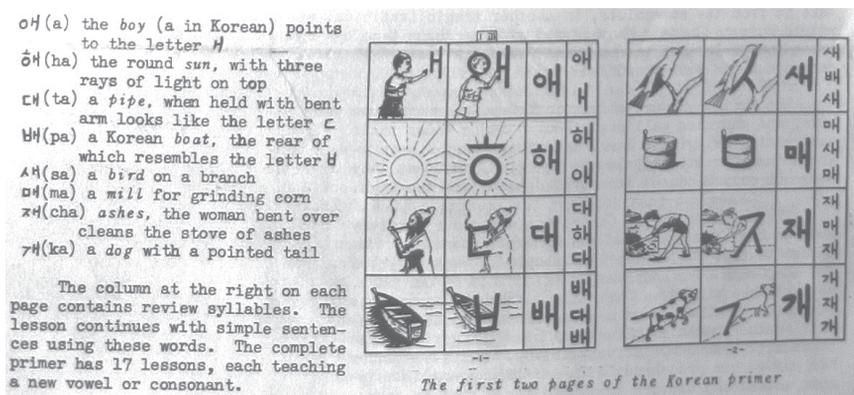
The *KCLA*'s main activities were literacy education and literature publication. For literacy education the association had three tracks—literacy classes, reading classes, and Readers' Clubs. Basic literacy classes were taught with *Hangeul cheotgeoleum*, which was first written and published during Laubach's visit in 1949 and subsequently underwent multiple revisions. Literacy class teachers would register the students with the *KCLA* to lend them each primer, then each teacher would teach five students for 30 minutes per day (*KCLA* n.d.).

For reading classes, the *KCLA* would lend a book to each student. Reading classes started in 1955 with texts such as *Hangeul dokbon* (Korean Reader; vol. 1 to 6 had been published in 1953) and Laubach's *Story of Jesus* (published in 1955). By the mid-1960s three types of reading classes were offered, one for Christians using *Story of Jesus*, another for non-Christians using *Hangeul dokbon*, and the third general class for all that read shorter booklets on various themes (*KCLA* n.d.). Once the members of the classes finished reading the books they were mailed back to the headquarters in exchange for another set of books. These reading classes provided regular reading hours for further improvement under the tutelage of a reading class teacher (*KCLA* n.d.).

The final step was its Readers' Clubs, started in 1957. Compared to other existing literacy programs in Korea, The Readers' Club was unique in its contribution to local community development by way of literacy campaigns. The Readers' Clubs seem to have contributed to local community development and cultural formation by encouraging community organization and the culture of learning (*KCLA* n.d.). The purpose of the clubs was to encourage the members to develop a lifelong habit of reading for lifestyle improvements and stronger Christian faith (*KCLA* n.d.). A Readers' Club would also function as a small library for areas without access to reading materials. At least 15 people, 15 years or older and with less than a middle school education would come together and apply to the *KCLA* to start a Reading Club along with the list of names. The *KCLA* would then send 20 books to the approved club, with the members required to write book reports on each title to mail back to the headquarters. Then the next 20 books would be sent to the clubs, and so on up to 100 books in total. Unlike other basic literacy classes and intermediate reading classes, Readers' Clubs were meant to be self-governing bodies that would eventually become self-supporting. They were recommended to meet twice a week to read books together, with 30 minutes to an hour for each meeting. Each club member was also given a Bible from the *KCLA*. Once the club became self-supporting, the association would send new publications (*KCLA* n.d.). The group-reading method practice by the Readers' Clubs enabled communal discussion and reflections on reading materials. In part

due to this, in the process of post-war rehabilitation and reconstruction, the learning communities created by the Readers' Clubs seem to have reformulated and revitalized the local community culture that had dissolved during the Korean War (Yoo, Jung, and Lee 2016).

The content and methods of the *KCLA's* literacy movement follow the characteristics of Laubach's literacy method. The earliest available *Hangeul cheotgeoleum*, written by Laubach and later revised by the *KCLA* (F. Laubach 1949, 1951, 1957), and the teacher training poster (Unknown 1949, see Fig. 4) employ phonics charts that show symbols for consonants and sounds with pictures as mnemonic devices. The illustrations in the primers were designed to have similar shapes to the letters (Fig. 1). Laubach's literacy text is comparable to an earlier *Hangeul cheotgeoleum* (1945) produced by the Korean Language Society, which had smaller typeface and did not block out the letter combinations (Figs. 2, 3). This 1945 primer also does not include any illustrations, and chapter numbers and certain words are written in Chinese characters. In comparison, Laubach's Korean language publication and the *KCLA's* subsequent literacy texts (Fig. 3) are much more similar to Laubach's earlier teaching materials in English or Hindi (F. Laubach and R. Laubach 1960). The *KCLA* identifies its publication principles as the production of interesting, easy, thin, and practical books printed with large font and abundant illustrations (*KCLA* n.d.).



**Figure 1.** Description of *Hangeul cheotgeoleum*

Source: F. Laubach and R. Laubach (1949).



lifestyle. For example, *Hangeul dokbon* (Korean Reader) is introduced in its preface as a translation of the language primer written by *Frank Laubach*, with chapters featuring “Sunam the Wise,” based on Laubach’s earlier text written in Burma (F. Laubach 1953). Sunam learns about food, farming, schooling, preventing disease, child-rearing, safe water consumption, and mental and emotional hygiene.

Another key feature of both the Laubach literacy method and the *KCLA*’s literacy campaign was the reliance on volunteers. The *KCLA* recruited volunteer teachers to operate literacy and reading classes as well as Readers’ Clubs. Volunteer teachers were often mobilized from among the “members of the enlightenment groups” in the rural regions who possessed secondary and tertiary educations, such as church workers, *KCLA* Readers’ Club members, and trainees (*KCLA* n.d.). The *KCLA* recruited teachers with slogans such as, “Anyone can become a teacher with only an hour of training!” (*KCLA* n.d.), although the teacher training classes likely took more than two hours. Periodic writers’ workshops and writers’ conferences were also provided by the *KCLA* (*KCLA* n.d.). Given what is known about the rigid teaching methodology in the Laubach method—with each word and gesture strictly scripted for the teachers—teacher training would indeed have been expedient. However, there may have been some qualitative differences between teachers and classes, depending on individual teacher capacities and the extent to which they followed the curriculum.

The *KCLA* initially depended on the contributions of the NCC (National Christian Council) in the United States but in the latter part of the 1960s the *KCLA* undertook a number of autonomous fundraising operations through membership fees and donations, as well obtaining revenue from book sales. According to Ju and Jang (1969), the general membership fee was ₩300 per year, ₩2,000 per year for a lifelong membership, and ₩5,000 per year for VIP membership.

### 3) Outcome

A report presented at the Christian Literature Convention in Manila in 1957 by Ahn Cynn Young, successor to Yoon Ha Young as head of the *KCLA*,

stated that in the two preceding years 58 teacher training classes had been held with 2,168 teachers trained. Further, in 1956, there had been 103 classes in which some 5,000 students were taught to read. In 1958, 4812 new leaders had been trained to teach 155 classes. By 1959, 1,000 Readers' Clubs were in operation (Rhodes and Campbell 1964, 355; see Table 1). Rhodes and Campbell (1964) also provide more information on "Little Libraries" that are mentioned in other sources on Laubach, and thus these may be considered the *KCLA's* own program for community libraries.

By about 1966, according to the *KCLA's Information Bulletin*, 3,801 Readers' Clubs were distributed throughout South Korea with the highest number in Gyeonggi-do (1,034), followed closely by Chungcheongnam-do (1,029). Other provinces had between 200 to 300 Readers' Clubs—Chungcheongbuk-do (260), Jeollabuk-do (261) Jeollanam-do (323), Gangwon-do (241), Gyeongsangbuk-do (304), Gyeongsangnam-do (302), and Jeju-do (47).

**Table 1.** *KCLA's* Activities (Years 1956–59, 66)

Years	Teacher Training Class		Literacy Class		Reading Class		Readers' Clubs		Little Libraries	
	Trainees	Classes	Members	Classes	Members	Classes	Members	Clubs	Libraries	Members
1956	2,168	58	5,000	103	-	-	-	-	-	-
1958	4,812	-	-	155	-	-	-	-	1,316	19,500
1959	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1,000~ 1,500	-	-
~1966	-	-	425,000	-	110,150	10,960	76,020	3,801	-	-

Source: Adopted from Rhodes and Campbell (1964, 354–355); *KCLA* (n.d.).

Note: Calculations are cumulative.

A closer look into *KCLA* activities in the early 1960s, according to Hwang (1979) as cited by Yoon (1990), is presented in Table 2 and reveals somewhat different numbers. Hwang records that from 1960 to 1963 a total of 43,000 gained literacy in *KCLA's* programs that were operating in about 1,800 locations. By 1963, membership in 2,853 Readers' Clubs had reached 9,500.

**Table 2.** *KCLA's Activities: Persons and Publications (Years 1960–63)*

Years	Literacy Class			Reading Class		Readers' Club		Publication (Type)
	New Literates	Literacy Teachers	Locations	Leaders	Members	Clubs	Members	
1960	10,000	700	300	200	3,000	2,036	36,000	43
1961	10,921	920	437	788	8,040	2,548	54,950	52
1962	10,921	700	503	200	9,300	2,959	-	59
1963	10,921	1,130	603	850	9,500	3,853	-	67

Source: Hwang 1979, 166, as cited in Yoon 1990, 130.

Publishing was another major activity of the *KCLA*. By the time its *Information Bulletin* was produced around 1966, 13 titles of step readers, 55 titles of shorter booklets, and 11 special books had reportedly been published, with total output showing a steady growth, from about 100,000 in 1957 to 1,050,000 printed by mid-1965. Another estimate reports that by 1969, a total of about 500,000 copies of some 80 different readers had been distributed by the *KCLA* (Ju and Jang 1969, 50).

On the impact of its literacy campaigns, the *KCLA* conducted self-assessment surveys among the members of Readers' Clubs. The sampling and method of these surveys are not mentioned, though numbers were procured to show overall improvement for village communities. Some 80 percent of individuals surveyed reported the Readers' Club "encouraged reading books and raised a cooperative spirit." Others survey participants answered that the program enhanced their patriotism (7%), Christian faith (6%), Bible-reading habits (5%), and diligence (2%). For villages, 50% of respondents claimed the Readers' Club "improved the living [sic]." Others responded that the Readers' Clubs had helped create a model village (16%), encouraged new hope (14%), refreshed recognition of the church (11%), decreased illiteracy (5%), and elevated harmony and friendship (4%). On the influence of Readers' Clubs on churches, respondents offered that they increased church membership (42%), revived Sunday school (20%), increased friendships (12%), encouraged Bible-reading (12%), encouraged devotional life (11%), and helped them toward a fuller understanding of Christianity (3%) (*KCLA* n.d.).

By the late 1960s, the *KCLA*'s literacy activities were winding down, around the same time national interest in literacy also diminished with the stable operation of compulsory primary education (Byun et al. 2012). Perhaps due to the loss of foreign support, the *KCLA* started collecting membership fees, before eventually merging with the CLSK in 1969 in a smaller capacity as the Literature Association Committee (Christian Literature Society of Korea n.d.). Clark (1961, 377) claims that the 15 percent national illiteracy rate in South Korea by the time of the merger in January 1969 speaks to the effectiveness of the *KCLA* and its literacy programs. This statistic corresponds with the Ministry of Education's literacy report in 1968, that estimated a 14.7 percent national illiteracy rate (Byun et al. 2012, 66). At this point, the CLSK shifted its emphasis toward producing children's books and Christian literature (Clark 1961, 377).

## Discussion

This study examined the adult literacy education activities of *Frank Laubach* and his influence on the *KCLA*, a religious civil society organization founded after Korea's liberation in 1945. The *KCLA*'s adult literacy education activities began with the support of foreign missionaries, especially *Frank Laubach* and his several foundations, which provided the pedagogical content and to a certain extent, publications funding. The fact that foreign CSOs, in partnership with the US government, contributed to the development of Korean education up until the 1960s, and that it was through their external financial support that Korean CSOs could sustain their education activities, are two points previous research rarely invoke. Based on these findings, the following implications may be drawn.

First, this study suggests that the role of CSOs in the adult literacy education sector in South Korea was significant. Literacy campaigns of the Ministry of Education of the USAMGIK, the adult literacy education efforts since the government formation, and the five-year Illiteracy Eradication Plan following the Korean War are highlighted state initiatives assessed as highly effective. But the participation of other agents in literacy efforts remain

largely unrecognized. Among CSOs, the Korean Language Society that survived through the colonial era is a notable representative organization involved in literacy education, but detailed descriptions of their activities are only recorded up to the time of Korean liberation in August 1945 with the presentation of their *Hangeul cheotgeoleum* to the USAMGIK (Oh 2014). Credible data on literacy education in night schools of the period have yet to be found and analyzed. *History of the Korean Night School Movement* (Cheon 2009) contains various records of nationalist literacy education during the colonial period, and literacy activities related to the political conscientization of laborers in the shadow of industrialization after the 1960s. Unfortunately, source materials on literacy education activities by the civil sectors in the in-between years (after national liberation and through the Korean War) are difficult to come by. Here, the *KCLA* partially fills the gap as an organization that boosted post-liberation adult literacy rates in South Korea, as mentioned in several studies (Suhr 1966; Yoon 1990; Hwang 1994; Heo 2004). The time of the *KCLA*'s activities coincides with the period when literacy education was one of the main policy concerns of the South Korean government. In addition, Laubach's method focused on basic and functional literacy, which was also promoted by mainstream Korean literacy campaigns (Yoo 2017). This leads one to the assumption that CSOs like the *KCLA* contributed to the noticeable expansion of the literate population of South Korea. It should still be noted that detailed and verified empirical resources on civil society's assistance to adult literacy during the post-liberation and post-Korean War era are not available. For example, Heo's study (2004) of the *KCLA* only lists the resources used for adult literacy education based on the writings of Ahn Cynn Young, who led the *KCLA* from the mid-1950s; information on prior years is still missing.

Second, one may assume that most of the education activities of CSOs after Korea's liberation were externally supported. The education activities of organizations with a Christian missionary purpose seem especially to have financed literacy education activities by sending foreign missionaries or transferring private support from countries with mission headquarters. The provision of external financial support provides a logical connection between two incompatible situations—South Korea's lack of resources

for education, and the simultaneous and rapid quantitative expansion of basic education. What is clear is that the Laubach campaign directly and indirectly contributed to the establishment, administration, and educational activities of the *KCLA*. Laubach provided support by sending and supporting personnel (Mabel Genso and Yoon Ha Young), producing and printing textbooks and reading materials, and providing institutional backing through connections with the USIS and his US-based mission boards and literacy foundations. However, exactly how much support was given, through what channels, and how the funds were managed and operated, have yet to be clearly determined. As the Adult Education Tax Ordinance initiated by the South Korean government in 1949 was not yet in effect, considerable portions of financing for literacy and other non-formal education initiatives were provided by foreign aid. Available data provides grounds to assume that the Laubach campaign financially supported the *KCLA* until around 1966. The *KCLA* then transitioned toward financial autonomy, with one of its fundraising methods being the collection of membership fees. According to the study by Ju and Jang (1969), the *KCLA* collected ₩300 per member annually. But either due to difficulties in sustaining the organization through membership fees, or due to political tensions among affiliated organizations, the *KCLA* merged with the CLSK in 1969, effectively marking the end of its literacy education activities.

Third, the early teaching materials and primers do not seem to have been extensively contextualized for a Korean audience. Although Laubach's literacy method emphasizes social and cultural contextualization—as Laubach approached the Muslim Moros in Lanao, Philippines by using the Koran and local stories—such contextualization did not happen to a similar extent in Korea. Perhaps Laubach could not tailor literacy education to the indigenous culture and religion of Korea given the practical constraints of time and resources. After all, he was in Korea for only one month toward the end of an extended trip to several Asian countries. He was also officially invited to Korea by a Korean Protestant organization with connections to the US Embassy, both with clear top-down religious and political agendas. Thus, in the first few years the earliest primer by Laubach, and translations of *Story of Jesus* and *Sunam the Wise* (in *Hangeul dokbon*) continued with

minimal revisions and contextualization. From available sources, it seems Laubach and his team were satisfied with the kinds of literacy content campaign system they left behind in 1949 (F. Laubach and R. Laubach 1949). Since Laubach's motives for spreading literacy were ultimately evangelical, anti-Communist, and moralistic, according to the mid-20th century American middle-class values, the education program may not have encouraged critical reflection and conscientization of Korea's social and cultural structures. As Christoph (2009) notes, the Laubach method's content and teaching styles preach both Christianity as well as American-style capitalism. Here Laubach literacy is distinct from Freirean literacy (Freire 1971), which induces political and critical conscientization based on social and cultural contexts.

Fourth, the effectiveness of the *KCLA* may be attributed to Korea's indigenous leadership and village-level campaigns with volunteers. In view of Laubach's short visit, top-down literacy initiatives, and uncontextualized early textbooks, indigenous leadership and community mobilization were factors that enhanced the *KCLA*'s impact. First, Korean church leaders, rather than foreign missionaries, directly led adult literacy education campaigns. These leaders had largely been educated during the Japanese colonial period, while some had even studied abroad, and maintained special networks with foreign missionaries in Korea. Here it is necessary to remember that unlike the *CLSK*, which functioned as a platform for various activities by American missionaries, the *KCLA* was founded with a majority Korean leadership. Although Genso and other foreign missionaries participated in teacher training and connected the association with outside funding and resources (Rhodes and Campbell 1964), Yoon and Ahn, along with the Korean founding members, led the campaign. Second, small-scale literacy education at the village level was a key strategy of the *KCLA*. The *KCLA* was effective partly due to the self-initiated Readers' Clubs, with volunteer members effectively sustaining and expanding literacy classes in small communities. This characteristic of the *KCLA* was influenced by Laubach's principles of volunteerism and evangelism, although the pre-existing influence of missionaries and the rapidly increasing number of Christians in the same period would have also contributed to the evangelistic

nature of the *KCLA*'s literacy campaign. It is also possible that the *KCLA*, with its goal of spreading the Christian faith, succeeded due to the rapid spread of Christianity. However, further data on Korean Christian history and the impact of the *KCLA* is necessary to substantiate this hypothesis.

Fifth, as examined in this study, the outcome of the *KCLA*'s literacy education campaign remains in dispute; data from different sources do not agree. Table 1 contains the measures recorded in publications covering foreign missionary activities in South Korea as well as the *KCLA*'s bulletin around 1966, and Table 2 is a chart from a report on South Korean social education (Hwang 1979, as cited in Yoon 1990). Since they report different numerical outcomes on the same indicators, further examination is necessary to determine which record should be prioritized. In Table 2 it is unclear whether the measures are aggregated for each year. The literacy education centers increased from 437 in 1960 to 503 in 1962, while the number of literacy teachers decreased from 920 in 1961 to 700 in 1962. The same pattern happens with the reading classes. The publication record shows the aggregate, so there is confusion whether the other measures should be taken as aggregates. In Table 1, if the 1966 *KCLA* data is considered more credible, the 1956 measure of the number of literates is underestimated, or the number of Readers' Clubs in 1959 was reported with too much room for error. If there are third-party sources on the data, records of literacy education by the *KCLA* could be more verifiable.

## Conclusion

This study examined the activities of *Frank Laubach*, particularly his visit to Korea that established the *KCLA*. The *KCLA* was a religious civil society organization that contributed significantly to adult literacy education in South Korea of the 1950s and 1960s. The miraculous achievements of adult literacy education by the end of the 1950s (Ministry of Education 1998), even amidst the turmoil of liberation and the Korean War, is noteworthy in relation to today's global agenda on basic education and knowledge-sharing. However, further research is needed to substantiate the popular analyses

that attribute all these educational achievements either to state initiatives or to the essentialist explanation of Koreans' "passion" for education. This research is an attempt to fill the gaps by examining the activities and achievements of *Frank Laubach* and his literacy method, then analyzing the *KCLA's* literacy campaigns in light of the Laubach method. As evident in various documents, missionary organizations, along with the Korean Language Society, significantly contributed to adult literacy education in South Korea. Gathering and organizing further resources on adult literacy education would add to the current adult literacy education discourse.

There is much left unrevealed concerning the role of *Frank Laubach* in South Korea. While literacy education progressed with Readers' Clubs in the 1950s, how these activities interacted with the state's five-year National Illiteracy Eradication Campaign, the Korean Language Society, and other adult education organizations and their activities need further examination. In addition, one might ask whether the outcomes of the *KCLA's* adult literacy education initiatives were merely collected for the association or reported at the state level in the process of cooperation and networking with the national government. As noted above, a closer examination of the activities of the Laubach campaign in South Korea would continue to a more complete picture of the history of Korea's adult literacy education.

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