

## EDUCATIONAL ISSUES OF THE MALAYS: STUDY ON NEWSPAPERS AND MAGAZINES BETWEEN 1900-1946 \*

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### **Abstract**

*Education is the main basis for the development of a nation. During the British imperialism, the Malay society was not given the rights to proper education. Thus, in the era of imperialism, Malay education system was deprived especially in its infrastructure and curriculum. Among the issues related to Malay society education in that era was its low quality, deprivation of Malay Language, and the absence of the higher learning institution (secondary school, college and universities). In addition, the level of awareness on the importance of education among the Malay society was still low. Most of the issues concerning Malay education at that time, were published in newspapers and magazines like Panduan Guru, Majalah Guru, Majlis, Saudara and Cenderamata. Malay Teachers are the people who raised up the educational issues during that era.*

**Keywords:** Malays, Malay School, Malay Education, Malay Languages, Malay Teachers

### **Introduction**

It is undeniable that education is an important socialist agent in the history of human development. Mankind will not develop successfully without proper education. Hence, it is not an exaggeration to claim that education is the most important aspect in improving man's life. Not many of us are aware of the educational achievement of the Malay society, especially during the pre-independent days.<sup>1</sup> The Malays' inferior and underdeveloped education level hampered the status of the Malays after the independence. Their educational level was mediocre, whether from the aspects of infrastructure, function, organization, and even the awareness among the Malays.<sup>2</sup> These are the issues that will be deliberated in this topic. Among the issues revolving around the Malays' which became a polemic in newspapers and magazines in pre-independent Malaya were:

#### **a. Infrastructure in Malay medium schools**

The educational development of a race is based on the progress of its educational system. It is impossible for a race to progress well if the schools are still imperfect and lack various facilities. During colonization, whenever Malay vernacular schools were mentioned, what came to mind was the inferior structure, surrounding and building of the school. They were shabbily built wooden structures without any partitions, hence the students were all housed in one classroom. This is one of the factors why the Malays were quite backward in their education compared to the excellent facilities provided for the English schools.<sup>3</sup> The situation could be described as:

“Malay vernacular schools were started by the government. The buildings were and still are, incomparably inferior, the teachers were untrained and badly paid, and the highest school standard went little beyond the rudiments of teaching, writing and arithmetic.”

“... to find the Malay school, it is necessary to go down a side street, where one may find a shabby, one-storeyed plank and thatch buildings”.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A more extensive discussion on Malaya's education during colonization can be referred from Awang Had Salleh's book, **Pelajaran dan Perguruan Melayu di Malaya Zaman British**, Dewan Bahasa and Pustaka, Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, 1974.

<sup>2</sup> A major part of the topic's discussion is adapted from the Education Chapter from my own book, **Guru-Guru Melayu: Peranan dan Perjuangan Pada Zaman Penjajahan**, Dewan Bahasa and Pustaka, Kuala Lumpur, 2009.

<sup>3</sup> According to Za'ba, the Malay school had a lot of shortcomings - buildings were not suitable in terms of design and building, no space for classrooms and library, had incomplete teaching materials, were lack of teachers and did not have headmasters. From Adnan Haji Nawang, “*Pemikiran Za'ba Tentang Kemajuan Melayu*,” Tesis PhD. History Department, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur 1995, p. 117.

<sup>4</sup> Sir George Maxwell at the Intercolonial Congress on Education on the Colonies, Held in Connection With the International Colonial Exhibition at Paris, September 1931 in CO 273/577, p. 6.

The condition of the Malay schools then, according to the editor of *Panduan Guru*:

“Most Malay schools were built without any room, unlike the English schools which had many rooms. In order to hold proper classes, there should have been rooms..”<sup>5</sup>

Other than problems with the building, most Malay schools were not properly equipped as they did not have systematic classes, and a limited number of available books, where a book had to be shared between three to four students. The library was also ill-equipped with reading materials. The response from the Malay students was not encouraging, which could be due to the lack of Malay reading materials.<sup>6</sup> What was obvious was that the Malay vernacular schools were not equipped with proper facilities and infrastructure compared to the English medium schools. The condition of the English medium school was described as:

“In any town in Malaya, one may see in a prominent place a handsome two storeyed brick structure, with pleasant grounds around it. That is an English school.”<sup>7</sup>

From the statement, it can be inferred that the British was not concerned with the development and well-being of Malay schools. This could be observed from the total expenditure allocated for the Malay and English medium schools, as what happened in Perak where there was a huge difference in the allocation of funds for the two schools.<sup>8</sup>

#### Allocation for Vernacular and English Schools in Malaya

Malay vernacular schools	English medium schools
Building ten football fields for Malay schools - \$3,000	Furniture and equipment to King Edward VII school extension, Taiping - \$3,000
Furniture for Malay Hostel, Ipoh - \$3,000	Building grant, Convent School, Teluk Anson - \$12,000
Furniture for vernacular schools - \$5,000	Furniture for the new Anderson School, Ipoh - \$14,000

#### b. Malay vernacular schools' curriculum

The curriculum developed for the Malay schools was backward /underdeveloped in various aspects. To improve the situation, the secular<sup>9</sup> system and educational policy introduced by the British had to be changed towards one based on a balanced education of religious<sup>10</sup> and worldly affairs to produce well-balanced individuals. According to Za'ba:<sup>11</sup>

“there is no remedy for all the hardships that we face until today except education, that is balanced with a combination of worldly and spiritual affairs, to ensure that we will be safe in the life after death / hereafter as well”

“The lessons should be based upon two aspects, that are for physical and spiritual that will determine of a safe passage in the hereafter. Physical education does not merely refer to physical health or medical aspects as assumed by most people, but religious knowledge that will guide our souls in leading a successful life in the world and hereafter.”

It is a public knowledge that the British educational policy towards the Malay vernacular medium schools was based in three aspects Reading, Writing and Arithmetics. Ideally, the Malay educational system should also have similar qualities like the English medium education, so that the would Malays develop and could compete with the foreigners in every field especially in the economic sector. According to the author of

<sup>5</sup> “Peraturan Kelas Yang Berperaturan Baik,” *Panduan Guru*, Januari 1924, p. 125.

<sup>6</sup> Paul Chang Ming Phang, *Educational Development in a Plural Society: A Malaysian Case Study*, Malaya Publishing & Printing Company, Petaling Jaya, Selangor, 1973, p 15.

<sup>7</sup> Sir George Maxwell at the Intercolonial Congress on Education on the Colonies, Held in Connection With the International Colonial Exhibition at Paris, September 1931 in CO 273/577, pg10. For more information, refer to “Memandang Arah ke Sekolah Melayu,” *Majlis*, 15 April 1935.

<sup>8</sup> *Memorandum on Estimates for Unreserved Services 1931* in CO 717/80, p. 9.

<sup>9</sup> According to *Kamus Dewan*, “Sekular” means things related to worldly affairs and has no relation with religion. *Kamus Dewan*, Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Kuala Lumpur, 1989, p. 1137. In this context, “Sekular” means an educational system that separates worldly affairs and religion.

<sup>10</sup> “Faedah Ilmu,” *Majalah Guru*, Julai 1933, p. 269.

<sup>11</sup> “Persekutuan Kerana Pelajaran,” *Majalah Guru*, Mac 1932, p. 46.

**Cenderamata:**<sup>12</sup>

“The aim of the Malay schools are to produce literate, transform the lazy Malays into hardworking ones in order to develop prosperous and wealthy Malay nation and Malays themselves.”

To develop a progressive race, the Malays need to have a systematic, varied education, as pointed out by the editor of **Majalah Guru**:

“the method in achieving the perfect knowledge is by learning all branches of information that could be the key towards better brain power and physical action, not just simple reading, writing and calculating exercises in school.”<sup>13</sup>

The education should encompass lessons in mathematics, science, financial management, skilled workmanship, business, agriculture, medical, economy, etc. It should be similar to what is offered at English medium schools. Among the subjects taught in the English schools were<sup>14</sup>

“The curriculum in the upper classes of English schools comprises English, Geography, History, Mathematics (Arithmetic, Geometry, Algebra), Art, Hygiene and Physical Training. Some schools teach Book-Keeping and Shorthand, some Advanced Mathematics. The largest government school in Singapore teaches Chemistry and Physics and Laboratories are being built at all new secondary schools. Botany and natural history are also taught. Handicrafts is practised at most schools.”

The Malays were deemed to be lagging behind in education due to the low quality of education they received compared to other races, especially the Chinese. According to Za’ba:

“as many did not receive any form of education, and no awareness towards education, hence our people are lagging far behind. However, there were also some Chinese who did not go to school, but they were very hardworking as they had been nurtured to be diligent for thousand of years, a trait they inherited from their forefathers”<sup>15</sup>

The Malay intellectuals realized that one of the reasons the Malays were not keen in attending secular schools was the absence of religious education.<sup>16</sup> They feared that in the race to seek progress in pursuing secular education, the Malays would be easily influenced with foreign culture and forget their religion and culture.<sup>17</sup> The Malays’ faith was not strong, as they often blend religion superstitious beliefs with religious rituals. They were still holding on to traditional customs that went against the teachings of Islam, hence the wrong practice of religious rites among them. According to Za’ba:

“we are Muslims, but only a minority of us really adhere to Islamic teachings, and fully understand Islam. In fact, there are some who no longer have faith in the religion, while some who may feel that it is just an inheritance from our unsuccessful forefathers that they need to keep holding on to.”<sup>18</sup>

“in every Malay village, there are some elders and educated men who oppose progress and advise the Malay children against enrolling in English schools”<sup>19</sup>

The beliefs that had been inherited from their forefathers were still practiced and this led to the Malay’s lack of education which caused them to regress from developing further. Hence, the intellectuals called upon the Malays to commit themselves to true Islamic teachings to strengthen the cooperation among them, apart from their reluctance to strive hard for a better living.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, the Malay intellectuals proposed that Islamic education is made a major subject in the Malay schools.

<sup>12</sup> “Perkhabaran Sekolah Selangor,” *Cenderamata*, April 1930, p.71. Refer to “*Sekolah Melayu dan Pelajarannya*,” *Saudara*, 3 April 1937.

<sup>13</sup> “*Pengetahuan dan Kemuliaan*,” *Majalah Guru*, Ogos 1933, p. 297.

<sup>14</sup> *The Policy of the Government of the F.M.S.* Were Summerised in a Reply to a Question at a Meeting in the Federal Council Held on 28<sup>th</sup> July 1924, dalam *Review of Education in S.S. and F.M.S* dalam CO 717/60, p. 3.

<sup>15</sup> Za’ba, “*Persekutuan Kerana Pelajaran*,” *Majalah Guru*, Mac 1932, p. 43.

<sup>16</sup> This is the situation where the Malay parents were worried that the lack of a religious education would cause them to be influenced by Christianity, as the early vernacular schools were handled by Christian missionaries.

<sup>17</sup> Refer to Mohd Yusof S.M., “*Anak-anak Melayu Peringkat Yang Akan Datang dan Ugamanya*,” *Saudara*, 24 Januari 1931, p. 6.

<sup>18</sup> Za’ba, “*Persekutuan Kerana Pelajaran*,” *Majalah Guru*, Mac 1932, p. 44.

<sup>19</sup> Za’ba, “*Persekutuan Kerana Pelajaran*,” *Majalah Guru*, Mac 1932, p. 44.

<sup>20</sup> For more information on the conflicts on the Elder generation and Youths, refer to Abdul Azizi Mat Ton, “*Kaum Muda di Melaka*” in *Jernal Sejarah*, Jilid. XII, 1973/74, Adnan Hj Nawang, “*Pemikiran Za’ba Tentang Kemajuan Melayu*”, PhD Thesis. History Department, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, 1995. (titled “Za’ba and Ajaran Refomis Islam Kaum Muda”) p. 61-99.

According to the author of *Panduan Guru*:

“it was not due to the fact that the Muslims did not have any syllabus, but what discouraged them from attending formal education in schools was the lack of religious subjects in the schools in the Peninsular.”<sup>21</sup>

Religious education faced financial problems and the lack of trained teaching staff assigned to the schools. The shortage of religious teachers at times forced some of them to teach in two different schools, as illustrated in the following statement:

“That religious teaching be had in all the schools. It was however felt that two or three hours every afternoon of religious teaching, after four hours of secular teaching in the mornings, was prejudicial to the health of the boys. Provison is therefore made as far as possible for one koran teacher for two schools.”<sup>22</sup>

Considering the importance of religious education to the Muslims especially the Malays, the Malay intellectuals proposed that religious education be exposed to the Malay students from an early stage at the primary level. According to the author of *Lembaran Guru*:

“It is pertinent to remember that part of religious study would debate on the issues related to the Allah the Almighty who had created man and all of the world’s inhabitants, while another part is the obligation for all Muslims to worship Allah’s might and benovelence.”<sup>23</sup>

The British government did not give provide the opportunity for religious education to develop compared to the secular schools. This could be seen from the amount of funds channeled towards religious education in the Malay schools in. In *Majalah Guru*, the amount of funds allocated to NNMB in 1932 for Religious Schools and Missionary Schools were compared, as shown in the following tables:

Allocation of funds for Religious Education at State Religious Schools	
State	Amount
Perak	\$ 49,859
Selangor	\$ 25,000
Negeri Sembilan	\$ 16,000
Pahang	\$ 11,052
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$101,911</b>

Source: *Majalah Guru*, Mac, 1932, p. 52.

Allocation of funds for Religious Education at mission schools	
State	Amount
Perak	\$ 296,000
Selangor	\$ 235,000
Negeri Sembilan	\$ 60,750
Pahang	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$591,750</b>

Source: *Majalah Guru*, Mac 1932, p. 52.

From the tables, it is obvious that the allocation of funds for Mission Schools was much higher compared to Religious Schools. This shows an unfair treatment by the British government towards the religious schools. The Malay intellectualls’ proposal that religious education be included in vernacular education was not an easy task to accomplish as they were under the governance of the British. To improve and elevate the quality of Religious Education for the Malays especially for the sake of the future generation, the intellectuals urged the Malays to found an Islamic College that has similar educational system like the established Oxford and Cambridge colleges.<sup>24</sup> The establishment of an Islamic College would indirectly improve religious education among the Malay’s youths as the graduates could strive in changing the mindset of the Malays, and defend Islam against attempts towards eroding the Islamic faith of the Malays in the future. To realize this, the Malay intellectuals called upon the Muslims in Malaya to establish an Islamic College. They called upon the Malays to emulate the wealthy Chinese who were generous in channelling funds to build schools to benefit their own people.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>21</sup> *Mengapa Orang Islam Tertinggal Ke Belakang*,” *Panduan Guru*, Oktober 1922, p. 8.

<sup>22</sup> “Notes on the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the Year 1934”, 27 Januari 1916, in CO 273/44, p. 3.

<sup>23</sup> *Lembaran Guru*, Ogos 1926, p. 6.

<sup>24</sup> Za’ba refers to the Islamic College model as a “Main School”, like Mohamad and Anglo Oriental College in Aligrah, India. The college was established in 1875 by Syed Ahmad Khan 1817-1898. From Adnan Hj Nawang, “Pemikiran Za’ba Tentang Kemajuan Melayu,” p. 124. Za’ba’s proposal was only realized in 1955 with the establishment of Kolej Islam.

<sup>25</sup> Most Chinese educational institutions in Malaya received funding from the Chinese government in terms of capital, teachers, scholarships, books, etc. For more information on the development, refer to “Regulations for Aided Chinese Vernacular Schools in

According to the editor of *Panduan Guru*:

“The Muslims are not exactly poor financially, but they are devoid of feelings and deprived in manner and awareness. If every Muslim unite with one aspiration, we would no doubt succeed in establishing a college befitting the Muslim’s image”<sup>26</sup>

### c. The segregation in the teaching of the Malay Language

The Malay language has been established in the Malay world for quite some time, and in fact, it was the lingua franca of the Southeast Asia region before the arrival of the colonial masters. However, since their arrival, the language was threatened and this affected the identity and sovereignty of the Malays. The Malay intellectuals were working towards re-establishing the language as an important language so that it would not be obscure compared to other languages, especially against English. The existence of the teaching of Malay language would determine that the Malay children would be able to learn their own language and hopefully would elevate it to a better position, similar to English that is established as a major medium of international communication. This would indirectly instill patriotic spirit among the pupils to revere their own language. The British policy towards the English language in Malaya was:

“To provide a lingua franca for the many races from China, India, Arabia, Japan and elsewhere, who would refuse to learn Malay, the language of a race with a culture less advanced than their own.”<sup>27</sup>

The state of the Malay language then was gloomy, especially with the Malays themselves scorning their own language. According to the editor of *Panduan Guru*:

“The Malay children had no respect towards their own language, in fact, they scorned the language as they felt that it was a waste of time in learning the language.”<sup>28</sup>

Malaya and the Malays were devoid of laureates that could undertake the tasks of developing the language as previously executed by Tun Sri Lanang and Abdullah Munshi. Hence, it is hoped that the teaching of the Malay language would produce famous linguists in the future, and the sentiment was echoed by the editor of *Panduan Guru*:<sup>29</sup>

“It is hoped that these schools would produce Malay scholars like Abdullah who were famous worldwide and whose works are still celebrated up to this day. But what is happening today is that there is no Malay dictionary that is written by the Malays, except for the Al-Mahmudiyah dictionary which was written some 30 years ago.”

According to editor of *Majalah Guru* called *Anak Negeri*:<sup>30</sup>

“If the Malay children in the Peninsular do not know how to write, read, and do Arithmetics in their own language, it is impossible for them to land jobs, what more set up companies or get involved in trade and business.”

At the time, there was a growing number of Malays who attended the English schools, and receiving secular education. The English schools were devoted towards nurturing the English language and instilling the Western culture. This was a worrying trend especially since the number of educated Malays was small, and it was hoped that they would shoulder the responsibility of preserving the language, religion and the Malay people itself. The anticipation was seen as:

“If the Malays only study in English, compete with children from other ethnics, study under the tutelage of non-Malay teachers, it is possible that in a 100 years, we will see the birth of a minority of Malays who would appear like cross-breeds who are ignorant of their own language, religion and cultural rites.”<sup>31</sup>

The expectation of the Malay scholars was that the teaching of the Malay language would not only produce individuals that could read, learn grammar and vocabulary, conjunctions, etc, but elevate the standing of the language by becoming linguists, editors, journalists, translators and other language-related occupations.

### d. The teaching of English in The Malay medium Curriculum

Learning English was important, as it gave a chance for the Malays to further their studies to a higher level, and to hold managerial positions in public and private services.

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*the S.S. and F.M.S. 1930*” in Co 717/79; and “*Scholarship for Overseas Chinese Students to Chinan University*” in Co 273/585; and Annual Report on Education in the F.M.S the Year 1931 in CO 576, p. 42-43.

<sup>26</sup> “*Mengapa Orang Islam Ke Belakang*,” *Panduan Guru*, Oktober 1922, p. 11.

<sup>27</sup> *The Policy of the Government of the F.M.S.* were Summarised in a Reply to a Question at a Meeting in the Federal Council Held on 28<sup>th</sup> July 1924, in CO 717/60, p. 1.

<sup>28</sup> “*Pelajaran Melayu di Semenanjung Kita*,” *Panduan Guru*, Julai 1922, p. 28.

<sup>29</sup> “*Pelajaran Melayu di Semenanjung Kita*,” *Panduan Guru*, Julai 1922, p. 28.

<sup>30</sup> “*Bangsa Melayu Boleh Pupus Jikalau Tidak Ada Sekolah Melayu*,” *Majalah Guru*, Mei 1931, p. 83.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

Hence, the Malay intellectuals voiced their opinion that the English language be taught in the Malay vernacular schools which was not previously a concern of the British government. They did not encourage the teaching of English in the Malay schools, as shown in the following statement:

“The Malay vernacular school, English is not taught in these schools. It may well be believed however that if English were is taught as a subject (as French or German is taught in a school in England) in the two highest standards, it would be not only a most popular but a most useful subject “.<sup>32</sup>

From the statement, it is obvious that the colonial masters had no intention of providing the learning of English to the Malays. They were worried that the exposure to the language would provide the Malays with a chance to progress and indirectly, open up their minds which would harm their colonial status in the country. The British had also rejected some requests from village headmen who requested for English medium schools to be built in villages, or for any new schools to be built. The only request granted was the opening of afternoon English classes. There was also a hike in the amount of fees that the Malays had to pay, compared to the normal fee of \$1.00 - \$3.00, a new scheme was introduced, where the fee was \$2.50 for the first six years, and \$4.00 for the following years for the boys while \$2.00 and \$3.00 respectively for the girls.<sup>33</sup> The Malay scholars were more vocal in demanding the British to provide English education for the Malays. According to Abdullah Yah:

“It is better if every town in Malaya could set up classes to teach English to the Malays. To overcome the financial burden, the Teachers’ Association of Malaya should forward a Proposal to the government to set up afternoon English classes in one of the Malay schools in each town.”<sup>34</sup>

The establishment of English schools would no doubt provide better chances for the Malay children and their economic standing as well. This is based on the following statement:

“To provide the more intelligent members of the local races with a language in which modern scholarship and science can be studied. Some of these persons enter the Singapore College of Medicine, others matriculate at Hong Kong University or Universities in the U.K. or go to the Inns of Court and may will enter Raffles College.”<sup>35</sup>

The only advanced English education available for the Malays then was MCKK<sup>36</sup>, which was however, only reserved for the Malay aristocrats:

“The Malay College, Kuala Kangsar is unique among schools in Malaya in that it is an institution organised on the lines of an English public school for the purpose of educating the sons of well born Malays. Many of whom later accupy responsible posts in government service.”<sup>37</sup>

Generally, the Malays had the awareness of sending their children to English medium schools. The age limit was set at no more than eleven, and that they had completed Standard Four of the Malay school. This is based on the following statement from the *Cenderamata* magazine:

<sup>32</sup> *Training College for Malay Vernacular Teachers*, in CO 273/57, p. 9, Arkib Negara Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur.

<sup>33</sup> Song Mi Young, “*Perkembangan Pendidikan di Negeri Melayu Bersekutu di Antara Dua Perang Dunia*,” Academic Exercise, Faculty of Education, Universiti of Malaya, 1989, p. 95-96.

<sup>34</sup> Abdullah Yah, “*Sekolah Inggeris Bagi Anak-anak Yang Lebih Umurnya*,” *Majalah Guru*, Julai 1940, p. 262. The issue was also highlighted in “*Pelajaran Inggeris di Sekolah Melayu*,” *Saudara*, 7 Mac 1931 “*Pelajaran Inggeris Di dalam Sekolah-sekolah Melayu*,” *Saudara*, 14 Mac 1931 and *Majlis*, “*Anak Melayu Dengan Pelajaran Inggeris*,” 4 Januari 1932.

<sup>35</sup> *The Policy of the Government of the F.M.S Were Summarised in a reply to Question at a Meeting in the Federal Council Held on 28<sup>th</sup> July 1924*, in CO717/60, p. 2.

<sup>36</sup> For more information on MCKK’s roles, refer to Khasnor binti Johan, “*The Malay College, Kuala Kangsar*,” 1905-1941, Master’s thesis, History Department, Universiti of Malaya, 1969..

<sup>37</sup> The letter from the Governor’s High Commissioner 18 September 1939 to Malcolm MacDonald, in CO 273/656. Refer to “*English in Malayan Education*” in CO 273/561. The number of English schools for boys built by the government in the Federal States in 1923 was 19, while 14 schools for boys and 11 schools for girls received aids from the government (*grant-in-aid Schools*). In that year, it was reported that there were 11,519 students attending English schools, with 242 receiving full scholarships fom the government, while 145 received other scholarships, and 2,192 received free education without having to pay any fees, while 489 received free education with contribution from foreign funds. Other than that, 323 English school pupils had passed the Cambridge High school exam that was held in December 1923, while in 1922, 280 pupils, (97 boys and 9 girls) passed the Senior Cambridge examination and 192 boys and 25 girls passed the Junior Cambridge examination. “Annual Statement from Honourable State Secretary for the year 1923 in “*Perkara Pelajaran Negeri-negeri Persekutuan*,” *Majalah Guru*, November 1924, p. 4.

“The Malay children enrolled in English schools should not exceed 11 years and have completed Year 4 in Malay schools. Hence, many parents eagerly sent their children, with some as young as five years old to the Malay schools. Anyway, the Malays’ intention to send their children to English schools had improved over the years.”<sup>38</sup>

When a comparison was made with other ethnics especially the Chinese and Indians, the number of Malay children receiving secular education was very low. In 1927, the number of Malay children attending English medium schools in NNMB was 3,772, Chinese 7,508, Caucasian 933, Indian 3,803, and others 268.<sup>39</sup> Meanwhile in 1929, the number dropped to 2,089, Chinese more than doubled to 16,642 while Indians was 2,131.<sup>40</sup> Even though many Malays could not attend English schools as they had exceeded the age limit of 11, the Malay scholars advised parents who could afford it to send their children to merchant schools that was more expensive than government schools.<sup>41</sup> The running of English medium schools received constant attention from the British government, believed to ensure that the English education provided for the Malays was just adequate to equip them in mastering the language, and nothing more. This is apparent from the following statement:

“Universal free education of English is not the immediate aim. English education must growth, but it’s growth must be gradual. Government is concerned today not with possible future ideals, but with practical measures directed to meet the increasing demand for English education.”<sup>42</sup>

#### **e. Higher Education for the Malays**

The level of education for the Malays was very poor as most of them only received secondary school education. This caused the Malays a dilemma as they faced difficulty in seeking better employment as in the business and trade industry, they had to rival the foreigners. Hence, the Malay scholars pressed for access to secondary and tertiary education for the Malays. The level of education made available to the Malays was only up to Standard 4 or 5, compared to the English school.

The only access to primary school or tertiary education for Malay schools was the teachers’ college. However, the numbers were not enough to ensure that all the Malays received proper education. According to the *Panduan Guru* editor:

“Malay vernacular education now only consists of two levels- Elementary (Year 1 to 4), and also Secondary (Malay colleges). It is the highest level of education we could receive. The question is, are we contented with the education provided? Is the training adequate?”<sup>43</sup>

Other than that, the Malay intellectuals proposed that the Malay schools extended their education level up til Standard Seven or Eight (Secondary School) and that all subjects must be taught in the Malay language.<sup>44</sup> University education must also be made available for the Malays to improve their education level. Among those who expressed concern was Za’ba:

“the education provided in the Malay language is not developed and complete unless we can establish one or two the status of a university schools that can be equated to, where the Malays can learn world and religious affairs. The school should be reserved for the teaching and learning of our children just like those practiced in India, China and Japan, unlike in the current system where it is difficult to indetify one Malay student compared to other ethnics.”<sup>45</sup>

“once the students graduate, they could advice other Malays sincerely, or they could become lawyers in debating the unfair treatment that the Malays are receiving at the hands of the colonial masters so that judges could pass just sentences according to the rites of the country, just like when doctors treat patients or engineers arranging rules that could facilitate his own people.”<sup>46</sup>

<sup>38</sup> “Sekolah Inggeris”, *Cenderamata*, November 1923, p.80.

<sup>39</sup> “Bangsa Anak-anak yang belajar di Sekolah Inggeris”, *Majalah Guru*, September 1928,p.176.

<sup>40</sup> Prosiding S.S. Legislative Council, 26 January 1931 in CO 717/79, p.18.

<sup>41</sup> Abdullah Yahi, “Sekolah Inggeris bagi anak-anak Melayu yang lebih umurnya,” *Majalah Guru*, Julai 1940, p.261.

<sup>42</sup> Review of Education in S.S and F.M.S in CO717/60.

<sup>43</sup>“Pelajaran Melayu di Semenanjung Kita,” *Panduan Guru*, Julai 1922, p.37.

<sup>44</sup> Among the individuals who proposed this are the Principal of SITC College, Encik Zainal Abidin bin Ahmad (Za’ba), Cikgu Hashim bin Haji Talib (College Headmaster) Cikgu Buyong bin Adil (College Teacher) and Encik Yazid bin Ahmad (Translator).

<sup>45</sup> Adnan Haji Nawang, *Za’ba: Patriot dan Pendeta Melayu*, Yayasan Penataran Ilmu, Kuala Lumpur 1994, p. 110

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p.111.

However, if the Malays were not ready, the establishment of a university would not be realized. If most of the Malays were not educated whether in the Malay vernacular or in English medium schools; or were still living in poverty, university education would not be successful. In fact, many of the Malays were still lagging behind as they did not receive formal education, as stated by the editor of *Majalah Guru*:

“It is only in these past 4 to 5 years that the number of Malays in English schools have increased, compared to before when it was difficult to find one Malay in every 10 pupils, which was certainly not adequate especially since not every Malay child is brilliant.”<sup>47</sup>

The Malay intellectuals, especially the teachers expressed their sorrow that there were still a number of Malay folks who were not concerned with the importance of education. According to the editor of the *Majalah Guru*:

“in a hundred, it was quite difficult to identify one among them who was aware of the meaning of education and the need to be educated and the benefits of education. It is only of late that more are sending their children to English medium schools, but mainly due to monetary reasons, not due to education itself. A few years back, they were discouraged by the Islamic scholars and the pious leaders. It was not an exaggeration to say that there were some who have not even heard of a university. All that mattered was the religious schools formed of thatched houses found in Kedah, or the learning institutes in Egypt or Mecca. Hence, there was not much development experienced by them”<sup>48</sup>

Thus, the Malay teachers called upon the Malays to “wake up” and work together towards improving the Malays by reforming their education system. They had to look upon the immigrants as example in motivating them to succeed educationally, as stated by the *Majlis editor*:

“Get up and hold on tight to all the jobs you have. Ask your children to strive at their studies and grab all the chances they could from the English schools set up in the country. During our ancestors’ era, there was not a single Malay school, but now, many have been established all over the country.”<sup>49</sup>

“Grab the chance and prepare your children to learn all they could from school. Seek as much wealth and money so that you could send your children to further their studies in universities abroad such as Hong Kong, India, Europe and America. Emulate the Chinese and Indians who rely on their own expenses or funds from their people’s society.”<sup>50</sup>

#### f. Vocational/Technical education for the Malay children

Generally, the Malay schools emphasized on the reading, writing, arithmetics and some living skills in weaving baskets, batik painting, carpentry, chicken rearing, vegetable farming and fishnet-weaving in order to train the Malay youths into becoming better farmers and fishermen than their parents. The British policy in educating the Malays is apparently stated as in the following:

Malay vernacular’s schools do not deliberately supply any purely vocational training, but the general trend of the training is while affording a sound grounding in the “three Rs” to attempt to foster an interest in agriculture and the other business of the kampongs.<sup>51</sup>

To give a general and practical education to those boys and girls who will not receive an English education and who will find employment in locations like agriculture in which a knowledge of English is not essential.<sup>52</sup>

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Refer to “Wakil-wakil Melayu dan Angin Universiti,” *Warta Malaya*, 8 December 1936, p.10. What was observed was that at the Medical College in Singapore, the number of Malay students was very low, and it was the same story in English schools. It was also reported that the number of Malay boys receiving English education was low compared to other ethnics, especially in the Straits’ states. In the Annual Report from the Straits’ Government’s Educational Enforcer office, it was reported that the number of Malay boys attending English schools was very low compared to children of European /Eurasian descent with 288, Malays 384, Chinese 1,183, Indians 162 and other ethnics 4. In fact, the number of Malay schools was surpassed by Chinese schools as there were 215 Malay schools, 332 Chinese schools, 98 English schools and 50 Indians schools.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Penulis Lama, “Kewajipan Pelajaran Yang Sempurna Universiti,” *Majalah Guru*, September 1934, p.324.

<sup>49</sup> “Masa Telah Tiba Beruniversiti”, *Majlis*, Julai 1939, p.6.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Education Department Annual Report 1931-1938 in MF A.N.M.1946/72 p.24.

<sup>52</sup> Annual Report on the Social and Economic Progress of the People of the Federal Malay States for 1937, in CO 576/71-72, p. 73



To give a general and practical education to those boys who have no desire to leave their kampongs and who will find employment in agriculture, or those boys who will find employment in which a knowledge of the vernacular is all that is necessary.<sup>53</sup>

The statement greatly emphasized the British's policy in educating the Malays, hence furthering the gap with other communities. It was true that the British did not prevent the Malays from getting education, but they monitored the people's educational development to ensure that they did not go beyond what was expected, which was to become better farmers than their parents. To improve the standard of education among the Malays, Za'ba called upon the government to establish a school that could provide skills training for them. Za'ba claimed:

“At least, they could learn to acquire the skills of craftsmanship like being a carpenter, goldsmith, blacksmith, shoemaker, etc. It is undeniable that all these professions need training.”<sup>54</sup>

Za'ba's recommendation caught the attention of the British government, that was highlighted in a report:

Government is prepared to consider the provision of additional facilities, if the need fee for is proved and finances permit. An officer is being deputed to study in Great Britain the aims and methods of the modern type of school with a vocational bias. The government realises the need of bringing secondary education, as a whole, into close touch with present day conditions in Malaya.<sup>55</sup>

The trainings suggested by Za'ba are skills in carpentry, business, agriculture and industrial. In the 1920s, there were several vocational schools in the country such as Trade School, Technical School dan Agriculture School that function as:

A course of teaching and training which gives to the pupils studies a definite direction towards the requirements of some particular callings or some group of callings.<sup>56</sup>

Even though there were already vocational schools in existence for the Malays, but it was not established with the intention of producing Malay professionals. The trainings provided were just to enable the Malays to have skills that could lead them to get involve them in small-scale businesses.

#### **g. The Malay education Fund**

The Malays' poor educational level was mainly due to their poverty. Their failure in sending their children to either the Malay or English school was because they could not afford the fees and expenses in sending their children to school. Hence, they need financial aid in order to educate their children, as stated by the editor of **Majalah Guru**:

“These days there are many parents who wish to send their children to Raffles College or Medical College or other universities in Singapore, however, as the fee and financial expenses are quite high, their only hope is by landing scholarships or any other financial means.”<sup>57</sup>

To overcome this problem, the Malay teachers proposed for the setting up of an Education Fund and United Company to raise the capital needed to provide scholarships or sponsorships for the Malays to further their studies locally or abroad.<sup>58</sup> Another problem affecting the Malays back then were the lack of contribution from the intellectuals in providing assistance to the needy Malays either through financial means or charity aids.

#### **Conclusion**

It is undeniable that education plays a vital role in ensuring the success of a community. Without education, a community will never gain the respect of others and will always be left behind in the race towards modernity and development. From the historical context, the Malays had always been backward in education, especially during the colonial era. There were a number of factors that played a part, but chief among them are the British government's stance in providing minimal education for the Malays; and the Malays' way of life during those days. These two factors were the major stumbling blocks to the educational achievement of the Malay community. In fact, it even affected the development of Malaya after the independence as the country did not have enough skilled and professional workforce to steer the nation's development.

<sup>53</sup> *Annual Report on Education in the Federal Malay States for the Year 1931*, in 576/42-CO 43, p. 20

<sup>54</sup> Adnan Haji Nawang, Za'ba: Patriot dan Pendeta Melayu, p.108.

<sup>55</sup> Report on Vocational Education in Malaya by H.R. Cheeseman, Malayan Educational Service in CO 273/630, p.1.

<sup>56</sup> Post Elementary Vocational Schools in CO273/630, p.9.

<sup>57</sup> “Buku-buku Melayu,” **Majalah Guru**, Mac 1941, p.101.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

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