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The Introduction of Special Malay Class among The Malay Community Until Independence

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Abstract

Special Malay Program is a two-year transition class for Malay pupils before they may enter Standard 1V English schools. Every year, special admission exams are held to ensure that only eligible pupils can continue their education after finishing Malay school grades three and four. This study employs a qualitative approach, drawing on materials such as the Colonial Office Record, Annual Report, District Office Report, State Secretary's file, and meeting minutes held in the National Archives of Malaysia. According to the study's findings, only male students were first given the opportunity to enrol in the Special Malay Class. Local leaders are working to encourage Malay students of all genders to pursue their studies in this field. In conclusion, after the end of WWII, the Malay community has become more aware of the Special Malay Class, which has resulted in an increase in applications. The implications of this article show that, even though the British did not intend to enhance Malay education in the beginning, the Special Malay Class effectively helped Malay pupils understand English.

Keywords: Special Malay Class, Malay Education, British Colonial

Introduction

Special Malay Class (SMC) is an extraordinary class for Malay students who are academically capable and interested in furthering their studies to a higher level because education in Malay vernacular schools is limited. After all, it only provides students up to grade five only. So the opportunity to get a better job in the British administration is there if they continue their studies in the Special Malay Class (Saad, 1977). Therefore, in line with education development, students from Malay vernacular schools can continue their schooling in English vernacular schools if they pass the entrance examination to the Special Malay Class (Annual Report, 1922). They will be in the Special Malay Class for at least two years before being absorbed to Standard IV English vernacular schools (Idris, 2016).

Issues in Malay School Education

The education policy of the British colonial government towards the Malays aimed to eliminate illiteracy and tried to limit their opportunities to develop abilities in various fields (Education Report, 1935). That proves that the British did not intend to make the teaching of English compulsory to Malay students (Saadon, 2009). Malay students wishing to enter English

schools must be under 11 years old, and boys and girls have passed grade four and grade three Malay schools.

The difference in school-age between boys and girls is that Malays are worried about their daughters' safety when they go to school (Idris, 2016). The Malays still hold fast and are bound by the customs and cultural institutions that are the backbone of their lives, especially when they are afraid of losing their workforce, especially when their parents go out to work to help manage the family. Malay school students who want to enter an English school need to enter the Special Malay Class to master English subjects, especially communication English and writing issues. After completing two years in the Special Malay Class, they will be admitted to Standard IV English schools (Loh, 1975). However, before being successfully admitted, they need to obtain an excellent pass in an examination and pass an admission interview to an English school (Annual Report of Education, 1920). This strict condition was because the British did not want the Malays to get higher education and ended up opposing them, as happened in India.

Literature Review

Idris, in his study entitled *The Development of Malay Women's Education in the Federated Malay States, 1896-1941*, focuses on the development of women's education in the Federated Malay States (NNMB) from 1896 to 1941. The focus of his study is a discussion on the development of Malay women's education seen in terms of the role and commitment of the British government in developing women's education. The result of women's education focuses on the development of physical infrastructure, administrative and management development, curriculum development, and financial allocation. His study also discusses the obstacles and challenges faced by Malay women's education from 1896 to 1941. Obstacles and difficulties discussed include customary and cultural constraints, administrative and management weaknesses, curriculum weaknesses, and lack of financial allocation. His writings have many primary sources, such as records of colonial offices, annual reports, and records of state government secretaries. However, the discussion on the Special Malay Class is limited as his study focuses on the education of Malay women before independence (Idris, 2016).

Compared to Mahani Musa, in her study entitled *History and Socio-Economics of Kedah Malay Women 1881-1940*, have discussed social and economic aspects in some detail. The writing focuses more on the socio-economic development of Malay women in Kedah and the problems they face. The interesting about her writing is the use of sources from court records and other primary sources. The analysis given on the Special Malay Class, although relatively brief, can help researchers understand a little about the development of Malay education and the British policy on education. However, her study only involved the education of Malay women in Kedah, and her discussion was also quite limited (Musa, 2003).

Ariffin, in his thesis entitled *British Colonial Policy Towards Malay Education in Malaya 1900-1957*, focuses on the development of Malay education in the British colonial era (1900-1957). His discussion focused more on the discrimination of British policy against Malay education in Malaya around 1900 to 1957. He also discussed the real intention of the British, who only provide primary education to Malays, especially for boys. The British colonial government also ignored the question of the Malay language, secondary education, and education for girls. However, overall the focus of this study is more on vernacular education in Malaya. Thus, due

to the study's relatively large scope, the discussion on Special Malay Class became limited (Ariffin, 2009).

Research Methodology

In this study, the researcher uses qualitative methods to produce a study that meets the characteristics of historical writing. The emphasis in this qualitative study is document and manuscript analysis. The research method of this document involves research and analysis of records that existed during the British colonial period, especially before independence. To obtain primary sources, researchers have referred to the National Archives of Malaysia to obtain primary materials, especially annual records such as the Annual Education Report. (Education Department Report), NNMB Annual Report (Annual Report of Federated Malay State), NNS Report (Straits Settlements Report), State Gazette (Gazette), private files, and also CO (Colonial Office Record), which obtained from the National Archives Malaysia and local universities. For the second source, the researcher conducted the study at the Tunku Bainun Library of the Sultan Idris University of Education, the Main Library of the University of Malaya, the Za'ba Library of the University of Malaya, and the National Library of Malaysia.

Findings

Development of Special Malay Class

Preference for male students over female students

Only male students were involved with the Special Malay Class at the initial stage. In Perak, male students entering the Special Malay Class increased to 316 from the previous year's 200 in 1922 (Annual Report, 1923). There was also an increase in the enrollment of male students in English schools from 789 in 1922 to 968 in 1923. There was an increase of 24 percent and 12 percent compared to other races. Thirty male students in Perak, namely ten at King Edward VII School Taiping scholarships, are offered at the initial stage. Next, ten people at Anderson School Ipoh and ten people for students of the Kuala Kangsar government-aided school with a value of \$ 10 (Annual Report, 1924). Scholarship recipients at Anderson School Ipoh live in dormitories. Meanwhile, at King Edward VII School Taiping, the hostel can accommodate 12 male students only. Kuala Kangsar government-aided schools did not provide hostels until 1924 (Annual Report, 1924).

In Selangor, many male students who pass and qualify for the Special Malay Class give a free fee (Saadon, 2007). This number increased in 1923 by 480 compared to 358 in the previous year. While in Negeri Sembilan in 1923, a total of 48 male students received scholarships. And another 390 people received free education (Negeri Sembilan Administration Report, 1925). The increase in the enrollment of English school students in Pahang obtains from two districts, namely Raub and Kuantan. 84% of the 56 students enrolled in English schools were from these two districts (Pahang Administration Report, 1923). Only five students failed during the Special Malay Class 1923 session in Pahang (Annual Report, 1923).

In the Education Annual Report in 1938, W. Lineham (Director of Education Straits Settlements and Advisor on Education, Malay States) stated:

There were no Malay Special Classes for girls similar to these for the boy because the number involves did not warrant forming these classes but the Malay girls were given special attention so that they would be able to take

their place in the higher classes at an age not markedly beyond that of the girls of other race who go to the English school without any preliminary vernacular education (Annual Report,1938).

This shows that in the Annual Report on Education for the Straits Settlements (NNS) and the Federated Malay States (NNMB), until 1938, there was still no Special Malay Class for Malay female students. So until 1938, without the existence of a Special Malay Class, the number of Malay female students in NNMB who attended English schools was only 367 people compared to 3 048 Chinese students and 1 750 Indian students (Idris, 2016).

Age of Students to enter Special Malay Class

Education Code II (Regulation for Aided English School in the F.M.S) in 1925 clearly stated that Malay pupils wishing to enter English schools must have conditions such as:

Section 16 (ii) and (iv) should be Amended as follows

Section 16 (ii) "The Pupil, if a boy, must have passed standard iv or v, and if a girls, standard ii or iii in a Malay Vernacular School".

Section 16 (iv)"the pupil must pass a medical examination provided that unless a lady medical officer can conduct it the examination may be remitted in the case of girls

(Free English Education for Girl, 1925)

Pupils interested in applying for Special Malay Class must be 11 years old (Inspection Report of Special Malay Class, 1938). When students are in Malay vernacular schools, they must submit a birth registration letter for school registration. That ensures that only students aged seven to 12 can study in Malay schools. Therefore, the Headmaster will ensure that every registered student has a birth registration letter (Birth Certificate) (Admission to Special Malay Classes 1948-1949, 1947). Apart from the birth registration letter, other statements cannot be used as valid evidence to determine the child's age (Admission of Malay School Pupils into English School Special Malay Classes for 1950, 1949). Malay vernacular school teachers will submit these student documents if they are selected for the Special Malay Class to ensure that only those who are eligible can continue their studies.

Table 1

List of Malay School Teachers

| Nama sekolah | Guru yang terlibat |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| High School Malacca | Che'gu Md Nor bin Hj. Hasan |
| Tranquerah English School | Othman bin Md. Amin |
| French Convent | Rokiah bti Daud |

Source: E.O.M No 286/1949 Admission of Malay School Pupils in to English School Special Malay Classes for 1950

Table 1 shows Malay vernacular school teachers in Melaka who needed to be present to send students to English schools on 25 January 1950. The teacher needs to bring student documents such as birth certificates and examination results to enter the Special Malay Class. A letter of the oath does not consider an official document in determining will revoke

the student's age and student's eligibility. The teacher will also need to bring \$ 10 as a Special Malay Class fee. Pupils selected for Tranquerah English School must wear a white shirt and yellow trousers. (Review of Special Malay Classes, 1950).

However, there were also applications from parents to enter the Special Malay Class, which reject due to being overage. Che' Mohd. Shah bin Mat from Kampung Buntut Pulau, Temerloh, to admit his son to Abu Bakar School Mentakab was rejected by T.A.E Barkor, the Senior Inspector of Schools of Pahang, because he was more than 11 years and 17 days old (Admission to Abu Bakar School, 1953).

Table 2

Location of Special Malay Class Admission Examination in Terengganu

| Examination Venue | Items tested during the examination |
|--|--|
| Sekolah Tengku Ampuan Mariam, Kuala Terengganu | |
| Sekolah Chabang Tiga, Kuala Terengganu | |
| Sekolah Bukit Tunggal, Kuala Terengganu | <i>Chongak</i> |
| Sekolah Jerteh, Besut | <i>Ilmu Hisab</i> |
| Sekolah Kuala Brang | <i>Bahasa Melayu</i> |
| Sekolah Laki-Laki Kampong Raja, Besut | <i>Kecherdekan</i> |
| Sekolah Laki-Laki Dungun | |
| Sekolah Laki-Laki Chukai, Kemaman | |

Source: Edu.T No.222/56 Special Malay Classes in English School (Policy).

Table 2 above shows the Special Malay Class examination venue in Terengganu in 1956. They carried out the exam simultaneously at all locations designated by the Chief Education Officer of Terengganu on 25 October 1956, starting at 8.30 am. Pupils need to be prepared to answer Ilmu Hisab, Chongak, Bahasa Melayu and Ujian Kecerdikan. The examination invigilator consists of Assistant Inspectors and Group Teachers appointed by the Terengganu Education Office. The headmaster of a Malay vernacular school must send the student's information no later than 30 September 1956. The student's data includes the name and bin, grade, date of birth, and birth certificate number of the student who will take the examination. Headmasters should inform all eligible students to take the test even if their parents cannot pay the Special Malay Class fees (Special Malay Classes in English School (Policy), 1956). Scholarships and dormitories will be provided for eligible students and admitted to Special Malay Class (Admission to Special Malay Classes, 1956; Sulaiman School Bentong, 1956).

After 1946 there was a high demand from parents of Malay students for Special Malay Classes, but their children lacked command of English. Therefore, on the United Malays National Organization (UMNO) initiative, various classes are held to ensure that students can master English well. The Seremban branch of UMNO delegates will meet with the Senior

Inspector of Schools to apply for more Special Malay Classes to open in English schools in Negeri Sembilan (The Straits Times, 1952). Kedah UMNO delegates provided additional English classes in the Alor Star and Sungei Patani areas. Two types at noon and night for Special Malay Class 1 students (The Straits Times, 1949). The Perak Clerical Union will hold courses three times a week in Ipoh for the Special Malay Class (The Straits Times, 1949).

Special Malay Class Curriculum

A Special Malay Class runs five days a week for 12 weeks each term

Table 3

Special Malay Class Schedule

| | 7.45 | 8.20 | 8.55 | 9.20 | 10.05 | 10.40 | 11.15 | 11.50 | 12.25 |
|-------|------|----------|-----------|----------|-------|----------|----------|----------|-------|
| Sun | P.E | E | G | E | I | <u>A</u> | HI | E | D |
| Mon | E | <u>A</u> | S | <u>E</u> | N | HY | W | E | HW |
| Tues | P.E | E | <u>HI</u> | <u>E</u> | T | E | <u>A</u> | E | D |
| Wed | E | A | <u>E</u> | HY | R | <u>G</u> | E | W | HW |
| Thurs | P.E | E | G | S | V | E | <u>A</u> | <u>E</u> | D |
| | | | | | A | | | | |
| | | | | | L | | | | |

Source: E.O.M No 265/1938 Inspection of Special Malay Classes in Bandar Hilir English School

Petunjuk :

P.E- Physical Edu.

E - English

A - Arithmetic

G- Geography

S - Singing

D - Drawing

HW – Handwork

HI- History

HY-Hygiene

W- Writing

Table 3 shows the schedule of Special Malay classes in English schools. The subjects studied during the Special Malay Class are Physical Education, English, Mathematics, Health Education, History, Drawing, and Geography. Thirty-five minutes allocate for each time, including breaks. English must be taught 16 hours a week instead of no stipulation for other subjects. The subjects that need to be homework are outlined in the student schedule (Inspection of Special Malay Classes in Bandar Hilir English School, 1938).

Special Malay Class 1 focuses on conversation exercises and storytelling activities about things that happen in the classroom. In contrast, grammar reinforcement activities relate to objects around the classroom and the student's body. For health education, students are applied with a good attitude in the classroom, how to take care of teeth, hair, and skin. Pupils will introduce how to maintain health in general. In addition, for the subject of Geography, students are briefly introduced to how to view maps through globes and weather systems and learn to convert terms in Geography to English. Arithmetic focuses on addition, subtraction, multiplication and division, fractions, and measurements of weight and weight (Inspection of Special Malay Classes in Bandar Hilir English School, 1938).

Special Malay Class 2 focuses on conversation exercises and storytelling activities using four Malayan Series books. While grammar reinforcement activities are related to parables, how to write absenteeism to school, conjunctions, and analyzing the use of active and passive sentences. For health education, students are taught about malaria, the life cycle of mosquitoes, a simple diet, and how to take good care of the food. In addition, for the Geography subject, students will review the things learned in Special Malay Class 1. They are also introduced to the movement of rivers, mountain positions, earth movements, and processes occurring day and night. Arithmetic focuses on large numbers, money calculation, profit and loss, distance, and space, as well as reviewing the topic of Special Malay Class 1 (Inspection of Special Malay Classes in Bandar Hilir English School, 1938)

The period for teaching and studying English has been increased 16 times to help Special Malay Class students improve their English language ability:

Table 4

Division of English time in Special Malay Class

| Activities | Allocation of time per week | Allocation of time per school term |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Reading | 5 | 60 |
| Grammar and Conversation | 8 | 96 |
| Spelling | 2 | 24 |
| Speech exercises | 1 | 12 |
| TOTAL | 16 | 192 |

Source: E.O.M No 265/1938 Inspection of Special Malay Classes in Bandar Hilir English School.

Based on Table 4, during the two years in the Special Malay Class, English subjects are highly emphasized to prepare students to enter Standard IV of English vernacular schools. So 16 hours per week are allocated for students to master communication English and writing. The full teaching and learning of English must also reach 192 hours during the 12 weeks. The activities include reading, grammar, conversation, spelling, and speech exercises. The grammar and conversation time allocation is 8 hours per week to 96 hours per term. The number of reading exercises per week is 5 per week, and the implementation 60 hours per school term, while the spelling is 2 hours per week and 24 hours per school term. Speech training is also mandatory once per week and 12 times throughout the school term (Special Malay Classes in English School (Policy, 1956).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the development of Malay education was relatively slow, but by the 1920s, the Malays had begun to realize the importance of education to their children. The British government also began to pay attention to the education of the Malays, although the efforts made were still limited and tied to the existing British policy. The demand for Malays to send their children to Special Malay Classes is increasing, especially for male students. After the end of the Second World War, the request from the Malays increased, causing many English schools to open in rural areas.

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