

English Language Teaching In Malaysia: A Historical Account

Hyacinth Gaudart

University of Malaya

Malaysian society is constantly regaled with opinions about the falling standards of English. Falling where and in what way, is seldom mentioned. In this article, the writer hopes to give a historical perspective to the teaching of English in Malaysia so that younger teachers may know what English Language education was like in the past, and why it is where it is now.

Introduction

Before the 1970s, public education in Malaysia was divided into four major systems according to the languages chosen as the medium of instruction. The four media of instruction corresponded to four sub-cultures within Malaysian society, having varying worldviews and holding philosophies which were not necessarily compatible.

The development of such a system of education is part of history and it is in that context that this article examines English Language teaching in Malaysia.

History of Language Education In Pre-Independent Malaysia

In the period before the coming of the Europeans to Malaysia, schooling in the Malay States consisted primarily of religious classes conducted by Muslim missionaries. These classes later developed into formal religious schools. Parents taught their children practical skills. The Malay royalty were taught the Quran, since they were to be religious leaders, and also military skills, and some astrology (Beebout, 1972:104).

There is a record of a Roman Catholic school which was set up in Malacca in 1548 (Wong and Ee, 1975:21). Little is known of what happened to the school after the fall of Portuguese Malacca to the Dutch. Little, too, is known of whether the Dutch established any form of education and also whether the early Chinese settlers brought with them any form of Chinese education when they first arrived in the fifteenth century. There is considerable documentation about education during the time of the British. Since it is from the British that Malaysia has inherited her present educational system, it is therefore to that period that one should turn.

British Colonial Policy

Although British influence on education in Malaysia can be traced from 1816, it was really with the transfer of the Malay States to the Colonial Office in London in 1867 that the British paid close attention to education. The British civil servants who served in the Malay States took an interest in the culture and lives of the Malays. Most of the more senior officers spoke Malay and considered themselves Malay scholars. The first dictionary was, in fact, done by a British civil servant, R. O. Winstedt.

Stevenson (1975) says that the British appreciated the value of educational planning and policy:

The Englishmen who ruled over the Malay States at this time had a most healthy respect for the potential of education as a socio-political catalyst.... The first thirty years of British rule in the Malay States saw the establishment of an educational system and the definition of an educational policy, the outline and contents of which were to remain basically the same throughout the greater part of their administration in this century.

The first real move in policy-making and educational planning came in 1869 when the Isemonger Committee was formed to enquire and report on a possible budget for 'education' in the Straits Settlements. It recommended increasing grants, especially to mission schools. The recommendations were approved, and it was decided to form another committee to review the whole subject of education (Stevenson, 1975:12).

In 1870, the committee presented the Woolley Report, which stated that educational development in the colony was slow because of a lack of encouragement on the part of the British administration and indifference on the part of the Malays. It recommended the appointment of an inspector of schools, reforming the grants-in-aid programme to all English medium schools, whether missionary or otherwise, and reforming vernacular education.

In 1872, A. M. Skinner was appointed the first Inspector of Schools. Although Skinner advocated the value of vernacular education, it was essentially only Malay vernacular education which was propagated. In 1876, aid to the Chinese and Tamil vernacular schools was stopped and government policy began to be directed only at a dual system of Malay vernacular and English education (Stevenson, 1975:13-14).

When the British began extending their influence into the Malay States, Kok Loy Fatt, in examining British colonial records, found that the Colonial Office had never at any time laid down a clear policy on education for the Residents (regional governors) to adopt. This therefore meant that each Resident could do virtually what he liked. The lack of a clear education policy in the Malay States also meant that there was a different rate of development of education among the Malay States. Malay education in Perak and Selangor, for example, was far ahead of the other Malay States, with Perak being even further ahead than Selangor. The Colonial Office appeared to be aware of this problem but only suggested that attempts should be made to achieve uniformity. On the whole, the Colonial Office in London left it very much to those in Malaya to guide their decisions in London (Kok, 1978:12-13). Thus, when Sir Frank Swettenham cautioned against teaching English 'indiscriminately' in the Malay States, this advice was heeded in London. The British felt that large-scale teaching of English would estrange children from their parents and give them an inflated sense of their own importance. English had to be taught only within limits. This policy later accounted for

the British Government playing a negligible role in the development of education in English before the early twentieth century.

In the few years before the dawn of the twentieth century, however, the British appeared to have had a change of heart. Swettenham himself, in 1897, advocated the teaching of English to be stepped up to meet the demand for commercial and administrative services (Kok, 1978:16). It would thus appear that the educational policy was designed to meet the labour needs of the Colonial power.

The benefit to the system, however, was that a greater interest was taken in education. In 1896, the Colonial Office asked the Governor of the Straits Settlements if he was in favour of a competent authority advising and reporting on local education needs. The Governor proposed the appointment of a Federal Inspector of Schools for the Malay States. This move led to the Education Code of 1899, based on the one in England at the time (Kok, 1978:7). The Code remained in effect until it was revised in 1908. The chief aims of the code were:

1. To make the grants to schools dependent on general efficiency rather than on individual passes.
2. To encourage missionary and other philanthropic bodies to undertake the work of education in English schools by liberal examination grants and by building grants.
3. To emphasize the importance of teaching English by making 'English Vocabulary and Composition one of the 'elementary subjects' with reading, writing and arithmetic, and strengthening it further by making 'English grammar and construction' a class subject to be taken with it.
4. To establish a system of grants to aid in the preparation of pupil-teachers, and to encourage by grants the preparation of native boys who showed any capacity for the Cambridge School Certificate examinations (Kok, 1978: Appendix A).

Over the years, changes were made to different parts of the code for various reasons, hardly any of which were educational. For example, the notion that the colonial government should encourage missionary enterprise changed when American missionary influence was felt to be increasing. In 1920, the Assistant Colonial Secretary expressed to the Governor his concern over the effect American education was beginning to have on the Chinese. He felt that the loyalty of the Chinese would be drawn towards America rather than Britain. Thus, when American missionaries wanted to establish a Methodist College, to be called the Anglo-Chinese College, the Acting Director of Education, R. O. Winstedt said that not only was it politically objectionable that an American College should be the highest educational institution in a British Colony, 'but the standard of scholastic efficiency is exceedingly low' (Kok, 1978:27). These anti-American sentiments were further fuelled by the report of the Political Intelligence Bureau which stated that

The activities of Americans in Malaya, chiefly missionaries and teachers, are coming to be regarded with some suspicion.... Their teaching is so pro-American as to be practically anti-British. A belittlement of England and a boosting of America is certainly a feature of the local cinema and the doctrines taught in the schools and churches are said to be on the same line (Kok, 1878:240).

The Colonial Office did not concur with these reports. Instead, it was disturbed at these accusations levied at its ally and requested the Governor to be more diplomatic and seek a compromise to the situation (Kok, 1978:27).

The discussion so far has centred on general British policy towards education in Malaysia. But British policy was also directed towards each medium of instruction and varied according to what

was expected from each ethnic group. This article will deal with British policies towards English Language teaching in Malaysia.

Education In English

English medium schools were the best organized and most developed of all the schools in the country. The English medium schools were largely of two types: missionary schools and government schools. Historically, the English medium schools offered pupils a chance of upward social mobility. Success in these schools meant better jobs and white-collar employment which was preferred to manual labour (Koh, 1967:72). English medium schools were the prestige schools, and it was felt that the type and depth of knowledge they offered were superior to that of the vernacular schools. This situation had implications for the society as a whole, because these English medium schools were mainly urban schools.

The English medium schools were open to all ethnic groups and led to different ethnic groups having mutual respect for each other as persons rather than as members of particular communal groups. Close friendships were established, overriding racial barriers. What the groups had in common was a mutually shared worldview that was Western in orientation. Chinese from English medium schools, for example, had more in common with Malays and Indians from English medium schools than they had with Chinese graduating from Chinese medium schools (Koh, 1967:72; Chai, 1977:198; EPRD, 1970:32). Together, the English medium sectors of the ethnic groups formed the elite of Malaysian society.

The first Western-style schools were set up by the Christian missionaries in Penang in 1816. The first missionary schools were called 'Free' schools, not because no payment was required but because they were open to all races. However, the truth was that, because the schools were located in urban areas, it was mainly the Chinese, forming the bulk of the urban population, and to a lesser extent the Indians, who profited from this education. Although the missionaries founded a few Malay vernacular schools in Penang and Malacca, their schools were mostly English medium schools. Missionaries had been prevented by the colonial government from establishing schools in the more rural areas of Peninsular Malaysia, because it would mean their working among the Muslim Malays. They thus concentrated their efforts in the urban areas and offered quality education in English. The Chinese who were at first suspicious of the missionaries were soon won over and supported them financially so that the facilities in these schools improved even more.

In the Borneo territories, too, the missionaries were the first to set up schools. In 1847, the McDougalls of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel opened their first school. In 1883, the Mill Hill Fathers opened St. Joseph's boarding school in Kuching.

Two aspects of these mission schools are thus important in this discussion. First, these schools were confined to urban areas because the colonial government had forbidden missionaries to work among the Malays. Since the majority of those in the urban areas were Chinese and Indians, it was essentially those two ethnic groups which benefited from Western education.

Second, the mission schools were the most successful in the education system at the time. In fact, it was the success of the mission schools which prompted the colonial government to introduce English medium schools of their own.

Unfortunately, even the government English schools introduced by the colonial government were confined to urban areas. In Peninsular Malaysia, the number attending such schools was thus only about 23 per cent of the total school population in 1935 (Beebout, 1972:51). Of those in English medium schools in Peninsular Malaysia in 1922, 85 per cent were in mission schools.

There have been different opinions expressed about this situation. Winstedt felt that 'the aided schools seem to have controlled an undue proportion of the English education throughout the country' (Winstedt, 1932:25). The Straits Settlements Annual Report on Education in 1924 viewed the mission schools as providing 'a useful element of competition and rivalry in our educational system'. Considering that the British government schools were educating pupils to occupy clerical positions in the civil service and not much else, it was possibly a good thing that so many mission schools were built.

The English medium schools, both missionary and government schools, were built along the lines of English schools in 1900, with a 3-5-2 structure: three years primary, five years middle, and two years secondary. Syllabuses and textbooks came from England and were actually out-dated and discarded materials. In government schools, teachers were of poor calibre, and many were untrained. Interviews with educators who were pupils in schools at that time, indicated that many principals of girls' schools, for example, were wives of expatriate officers. In comparison, teachers in mission schools seemed more dedicated to the education of their pupils.

The only exception to the education of Malays was the setting up of a special English medium school to train the upper echelons of Malay society. The British believed that as these upper-class Malay children were to be the leaders of the people, they should receive special training (Ibrahim Saad, 1979:136-8). Accordingly, the Malay College was set up in Kuala Kangsar, and was to be the prototype, many years later, of the residential schools which now exist in various parts of the country. It was also from the Malay College that the first nationalist dissidents against the British arose (Chai, 1977:25).

Post World War II Education

After the Second World War, the British were faced with problems of a communist insurrection, Malay nationalism, and communal politics. To cope with these problems, the British decided that one possible solution was to use education as a tool for political integration and nation building. The education policy was thus geared towards this end (Chai, 1977:25).

One dissatisfaction which was expressed by the Malay nationalists was the standard of Malay education (*Malayan Union Annual Report*, 1947:25). In 1950, the British appointed the Barnes Committee to look into this problem. It did not concentrate just on Malay education but also looked into the problems of Malaya's plural society. It was concerned with nation building and made suggestions towards this end. According to the *Federation of Malaya Report of the Commission on Malay Education* (1951: Ch. 4, paras. 2 and 3):

Our approach is governed by the belief that the primary school should be treated avowedly and with full deliberation as an instrument for building up a common Malayan nationality.... Thus, our first step is to call in question the public provision or maintenance of separate vernacular schools for any social community, and to suggest instead a single-type primary school open to pupils of all races and

staffed by teachers of any race, provided only that those teachers possess the proper qualifications and are federal citizens.

To achieve this, the Report suggested that State and Federal financial aid be withdrawn from Tamil and Chinese schools, so that those schools could eventually be phased out. It also recommended a national education system that would lead into a bilingual system in Malay and English.

The recommendations raised a storm of protest among the Chinese community, however. To placate the Chinese, the colonial government, in 1951, invited Dr William Fenn (an American) and Dr Wu Teh-yao (a United Nations official) to study Chinese education in Malaya. The result was what is now known as the Fenn-Wu Report or *Chinese Schools* and the *Education of Chinese Malaysians: The Report of a Mission Invited by the Federation Government to Study the Problem of the Chinese in Malaya*. The Fenn-Wu report (1951: Chap. 2) found that the Chinese leaders were concerned about the elimination of Chinese schools, and with it the possible elimination of their culture. It therefore recommended that what ought to be considered was not the elimination of Chinese schools and the suppression of Chinese culture, but a system of education in which pupils in Chinese schools would, besides learning Chinese, also learn Malay and English. This system would make the Chinese medium pupils trilingual and all other pupils at least bilingual. Chinese schools would thus be integrated into the national system and yet not be destroyed.

The situation at this time may be summed up by the observations of Chai Hon Chan who points out that the Malay, Chinese, and Tamil schools promoted ethnocentricity as they

socialized the child to a Malay, or a Chinese or an Indian world-view which was relevant to the maintenance of the cultural identity of each group, but they were all increasingly incongruous in the rapidly changing political, social, and economic conditions of a country preparing for national independence (Chai, 1977:26).

On the other hand, English medium schools promoted the acquisition of foreign, Western values.

The major weakness of the English schools was the basic alienness of the cultural values transmitted, but as multi-ethnic schools their strength lay in the institutional framework they provided for the social and cultural integration of all those who attended them. Unfortunately, the tendency for English schools to be located in the urban centres resulted in their enrolments being predominantly Chinese who formed the bulk of the urban population. While the vernacular schools manifestly served to reinforce the group identity of each of the three major groups, the English schools effectively weakened the traditional cultural loyalties of those who became, in varying degrees, westernized. Thus the outstanding result of the quadrilingual educational system was the social and cultural isolation of the Malays, Chinese and Indians educated in their own language, and the emergence of a cosmopolitan, modernizing group drawn in varying proportions from the three traditional communities whose common bond was English.... English education tended to create a new division within each group so that, for example, social differences appeared between the English-educated Chinese and the Chinese-educated and vernacular-educated among the Malays and Indians (Chai, 1977:27).

At Independence then, divisions had already been created in Malaysian society largely through education. The newly independent country set itself the task of attempting to remove these divisions and inequalities in education and yet maintain internal peace. Planning appeared to be the keystone and so policies and plans were formulated to meet these needs.

Language Education in Independent Malaysia

The first educational report, the report of the Education Committee of 1956 or the Razak Report (so-called after its chairman, Dato Abdul Razak bin educational policy in Malaysia. In many ways the Razak Report incorporated the ideas of the Barnes Committee and Fenn-Wu Reports. The Report made it clear that although the intention of the government was to gradually introduce Malay as the national language, it also had full intentions of maintaining other local languages, and certainly attempting to ensure that every child was able to function in more than one language. Non-Malay children were to be encouraged to acquire Malay while Malay children were to be encouraged to acquire English, which was to be a compulsory subject in all schools. The Report (1956: No. 20: pp. 4-11) recommended that:

Instruction in Kuo Vu (Mandarin) and Tamil shall be made available in all Primary Schools maintained in whole or in part from public funds when the parents of fifteen children from any one school request that instruction should be given in either of these languages.... We recognize that it is difficult to provide for all the various languages in small schools and recommend that, where possible, such small schools should be grouped into larger units.... We consider that there should be some flexibility in our secondary school system.... We can see no reason for altering the practice in Chinese Secondary Schools of using Kuo Vu as a general medium provided that these Chinese schools fall into line with the conditions mentioned (being a national secondary school, working towards common final examinations and where the teaching of English and Malay are compulsory).

The Razak Report (1956: No. 20: pp. 4-5) also recommended that the Roman script (or Rumi) be used, although the Perso-Arabic script (or Jawi) would continue to be taught to Muslim pupils.

One interesting recommendation of the Report (1956: No. 20: p. 12) was: 'We see no educational objection to the learning of three languages in secondary schools or to the use of more than one language in the same school as the medium of instruction.'

These views were reiterated further by the Education ordinance of 1957. Schools which opted into the national system of education were thus encouraged towards bilingualism.

The Razak Report (1956: No. 20: p.14) recommended a number of positive and negative sanctions which were later adopted by the Ministry of Education and other government departments of independent Malaysia. Briefly, these sanctions included:

- a. making the Malay language a qualification at the various levels of entry into the government service;
- b. using the Malay language as a factor for selection for secondary education;
- c. making the Malay language compulsory in all government departments;
- d. making the Malay language a requirement for anyone aspiring to a scholarship from public funds;
- e. providing bonuses in government service to encourage a more rapid acquisition of the language;
- f. varying grants to schools depending in part on the successful learning of Malay as and when adequate facilities could be provided;
- g. making the Malay language a compulsory part of teacher training courses and examinations;
- h. not charging fees to pupils in adult education classes formed to study the Malay language.

The encouragement of the use of the National Language in teacher training and the caution regarding adequate facilities were important because at Independence and long afterwards, there were insufficient teachers of the National Language. Accordingly, directives were given to the Director of Education, asking that Malay or Bahasa Melayu be made a 'principal subject' in the Higher School Certificate, that special bursaries for the study of Malay be provided at the university and that specialized courses in Malay be introduced into teacher training colleges (Razak Report, 1956: No. 20: p.5).

In 1960, the next educational report, the Rahman Talib Report, further recommended that inducements should be offered to qualified teachers already in school to study the Malay language or, as it was then known, the National Language. These teachers should ultimately qualify themselves to teach through the medium of the National Language.

The reason why there was such a heavy emphasis on the learning of Malay was, as has been stated, to make Malay the national language of the newly independent country which, until that time, had no common language among its very diverse population. There was a belief that a common language would create a common culture and so create a new national identity. The reason given for studying English was economic. 'No secondary school pupil shall be at a disadvantage in the matter either of employment or of higher education in Malaya or overseas as long as it is necessary to use the English language for these purposes' (Razak Report, 1956:1 2).

To accomplish all this, the education service was also restructured. The Ministry of Education was set up to be generally responsible for the implementation of educational policy throughout the country (Razak Report, 1956:6). The Inspectorate of Schools was set up, 'independent of the Director of Education... selected, promoted and controlled for disciplinary purposes by a special board appointed by the High Commissioner' (Razak Report, 1956:8). The Inspectors were supposed to report directly to the Minister of Education. Their reports to the Minister were confidential and not made available to anyone other than the Director of Education and those directly concerned with the administration of the particular schools visited (Razak Report, 1956:8). That code of secrecy, apparently meant as a face-saving device for the schools concerned, is still maintained today.

The Razak Report (1956:10) also put forward an important policy which was to change the fabric of education in Malaysia and guide education in Malaysia up to the present. There were two aspects of this policy. The first was a policy decision to convert the then government schools into 'Standard schools by the introduction of National Language streams, and to convert both government and aided schools to standard-type schools by the use of appropriately trained teachers'. This policy decision was later interpreted to mean that all schools in Malaysia were to be taught in the medium of the National Language.

The other important policy decision concerned the formulation of a common syllabus for all primary schools. Although no specific mention was made of a common syllabus for secondary schools, the fact that pupils would be sitting for a common examination ensured that the content of their syllabus would be similar. It was felt that a common syllabus was absolutely necessary for the development and unity of the newly independent nation.

We cannot overemphasize our conviction that the introduction of syllabuses common to all schools in the Federation is the crucial requirement of educational policy in Malaya. It is an essential element in the development of a united Malayan nation. It is the key which will unlock the gates hitherto standing locked and barred against the establishment of an educational system "acceptable to the people of Malaya as a whole". Once all schools are working to a common content syllabus,

irrespective of the language medium of instruction, we consider the country will have taken the most important step towards establishing a national system of education which will satisfy the needs of the people and promote their cultural, social, economic, and political development as a nation (Razak Report, 1956:18).

The report equated a syllabus to a curriculum. It was only with the establishment of the Curriculum Development Centre that this basic concept came to be gradually rethought. Today, therefore, the policy decision of the report has been interpreted to mean a common curriculum rather than a common syllabus.

Another recommendation of the Razak Report had to do with class size. It recommended that classes should be kept to a maximum of 40 pupils in primary schools. This recommendation could not be followed. Interviews with some educators who were principals of schools at the time, indicate that classes of 50 in primary schools in the main towns were the norm rather than the exception. The Rahman Talib Report (1960:11) later stated that it had not been possible to keep to the limit of 40 per class. Permission to raise the maximum number to 44 was first given to Chinese schools and as from 1957 all primary schools were allowed up to 50 pupils as the maximum in Standards (Levels) I, II and III. The KBSR, almost thirty years later, also seeks to limit class size to 40. Like the Razak Report, this aspect of the curriculum has not been possible to enforce.

The recommendations of the Razak Report regarding language education indicate that decisions were made based on social factors and ignored any linguistic considerations. The result, for example, was that Kuo Yu was recommended to be taught rather than the two majority mother-tongue dialects of the Chinese community in Malaysia - Cantonese and Hokkien. Difficulties that might arise from learning different scripts were ignored. Problems of being taught in a dialect that was close to one's own and yet was different and of a higher status were glossed over. English had to be taught but how effectively it was taught was of secondary importance. These problems are now rearing their heads in modern Malaysia.

One result of the Razak Report was the establishment of independent Malaysia's first, but short-lived bilingual schools, having a dual medium of instruction in English and Malay. These schools were mainly English medium schools which started classes whose medium of instruction was Malay. The government also asked the University of Malaya to consider the feasibility of introducing the Malay medium into university courses with the ultimate aim of evolving a bilingual university in Kuala Lumpur' (Rahman Talib Report, 1960:4).

The Rahman Talib Report of 1960, although reiterating the nation's stand for bilingual education, was more explicit as to the type and features of bilingual education it considered desirable. The guiding feature was nation unity through making the Malay language the National Language. While reiterating the need for Malay and English 'to be compulsory subjects in the curriculum of all schools', the Report also made it clear that primary education in all four languages should not be continued into the secondary schools.

It would be incompatible with an educational policy designed to create national consciousness and having the intention of making the Malay language the national language of the country to extend and to perpetuate a language and racial differential throughout the publicly-financed educational system.... We recommend that education at secondary level paid for from public funds shall be conducted mainly in the medium of one of the two official languages (Malay and English) with the intention of ultimately using the national language as the main medium of instruction, except that other languages and literatures may be taught and learnt in their own media.... It is not possible,

within the framework of a policy which is truly national, to Satisfy completely all the individual demands of each cultural and language group in the country. We believe that the present system of providing at public expense primary education in each of the four main languages... goes as far as is reasonably possible for a national Malayan system to go in satisfying the needs of our various peoples (Rahman Talib Report, 1960:3-4).

To reinforce the policy, the Report recommended that the two secondary school public examinations be conducted only in the 'nation's official languages'. The authors of the Report were fully aware of the complication and implications of such a move but felt that this was desirable for the sake of nation-building. The Report therefore did not directly force secondary schools to convert to a Malay medium of instruction. However, Malayan (and later, Malaysian) society being an examination-oriented one, secondary schools would be forced to consider changing to either the Malay medium or English medium since the public examinations would be conducted only in Malay or English. Most Chinese medium schools chose to convert to English medium schools.

To aid the transition from Chinese and Tamil medium primary schools to Malay or English medium secondary schools, a new class was created called the Remove Class. This extra year was to allow pupils to concentrate mainly on Malay or English, depending on which medium of instruction they would be pursuing their secondary education in.

Realizing that conversion of a Malay medium of instruction would be extremely difficult without appropriate textbooks, the report also recommended that the Ministry of Education appoint qualified teachers to translate books into Malay, even if it meant offering financial inducements for them to do so, It is interesting to note that it was assumed that, because they were trained teachers and, presumably, native speakers, that they would first, be able to translate books from English into Malay and second, do so within a reasonable time'.

One recommendation which is significant for teachers of English is that 'research until 1965 should be concentrated on the Malay language and teaching of it and that research into other languages used in Malaya and the teaching of them should thereafter be introduced' (Rahman Talib Report, 1960:46).

Language Education in the 1960s and 1970s

With the implementation of the recommendations of these two reports, some problems were solved, but other conflicts arose. English medium schools performed better than did Malay medium schools. English schools had better physical plants and facilities, better qualified teachers, and spent much more per pupil than did Malay and Tamil schools. Moreover, pupils attending those schools came from higher income homes and parents could afford to contribute more towards their education (Dropout Report, 1973:112-14).

British policy also encouraged differences between the states so that certain states had better educational facilities than others. The west coast states of Peninsular Malaysia were much better off, for example, than the east coast states of Peninsular Malaysia. But the Malaysian states in Borneo were the worst off, educational development coming to them only after they achieved independence within Malaysia in 1963.

Those in the Malay medium and in certain states began to feel that they were being deprived of the assets made available to English medium pupils. Various Malay groups in Peninsular Malaysia began agitating for an acceleration of the enforcement of the national language policy.

In May 1969, the country witnessed the most serious race riots in its history. In July, while the country was still in shock from these riots, the then Minister of Education, Haji Abdul Rahman Ya'akub announced over national television that in January 1970, all English medium schools would be converted into Malay medium schools, starting from Standard 1 and moving up the education system with that group until 1983 or 1984 when conversion would be complete. According to Goh Cheng Teik (1971:32) this declaration by the Minister was made without the knowledge and consent of the Prime Minister or the Cabinet.

The English educated of all communities were greatly concerned with this new development. Education policy had stated that Malay was to be made the main medium of instruction and somehow it had been assumed that English would remain as a secondary medium of instruction. They now had to face the fact that while Tamil and Chinese primary schools would continue to exist, English medium schools would be phased out.

Teachers in the English medium schools were hit the hardest by the conversion of the medium of instruction to Malay. Although language courses had been offered to non-Malay teachers, three months' exposure to Bahasa Malaysia was less than adequate to equip teachers to teach their subjects in Malay. Teachers also found the translation of terminologies, especially scientific terminology, inadequate for their needs.

At the lower secondary level, rote memory became the major teaching style. Teachers learned a few facts by rote, recited them to the class and then got pupils to read from their textbooks. Since the format of the lower secondary public examination was an objective examination, pupils too, were encouraged to rote memorize facts and figures.

At the upper secondary level there were even worse problems. English medium teachers, who were normally more than competent in their fields, were suddenly inadequate. In the sixth form or pre-university classes where much more technical knowledge was called for, teachers found it even more difficult to communicate in Bahasa Malaysia. Teachers who had scholarships abroad where they had been distinguished students in their cognate fields now found themselves unable to function satisfactorily because of the language difficulty.

This situation resulted in stimulating an exodus of Malaysian teachers, an emigration which had really begun soon after Independence by Western-orientated professionals. The preference was for Singapore and on a smaller scale Hong Kong, Australia, Canada, and Brunei.

Other teachers found another way out, they became teachers of the English language. To make up for the phasing out of English medium schools, the government had stressed that English would be taught as a strong second language and, if necessary, the time allotted to English as a subject in schools would be increased (Chai, 1977:33). Many teachers, despite the lack of training in methodology, began teaching English in schools. Hardly any attempts were made to provide in-service training to upgrade their teaching techniques.

In 1970, it was stipulated that a candidate must have the minimum of a 'pass' in Bahasa Malaysia (as the National Language was then named), in order to qualify for the school-leaving certificate called the MCE or Malaysian Certificate of Education. For the first few years after a pass in Bahasa

Malaysia in the MCE was made compulsory, the percentage of passes for the school leaving certificate examinations in the former English medium schools fell drastically, mainly because of failure in the Bahasa Malaysia paper. Pillai (1973:16) reported that in 1972 more than half the English medium pupils failed to obtain the MCE despite performing well in other subjects. The large number of failures served to remind the public of the earnestness of the government to implement the national language policy.

Even so, in 1973 a report on the 'Study About Opinions on Education and Society' in analysing examination success, indicated that the academic achievement of English medium schools was higher than that of the vernacular schools. Opinions also indicated that English medium schools were considered of higher prestige. 'The physical conditions of the English medium schools, the facilities available therein and the type of teaching staff they have, contribute to making the English medium school the prestige school in the Malaysian school system' (Asmah, 1976:5).

The Second and Third Malaysia Plans attempted to close the gap between the different types of schools. The Plans also reiterated the need for a search for a national identity and saw this as involving the formulation of educational policies designed to promote common values and loyalties among all races. One way of achieving both equality of educational opportunity and the attainment of a national identity was, it was felt, through the 'implementation, in stages, of Bahasa Malaysia as the main medium of instruction in schools' (Second Malaysia Plan, 1971:232). The Second Malaysia Plan (1971: 232), in planning Malaysia's development for the years 1971-5, envisaged that by 1975 all subjects, except English and other languages, would be taught in Bahasa Malaysia at the primary level, and by 1982 all secondary subjects would be in Bahasa Malaysia. Plans for the greater use of Bahasa Malaysia in Sabah and Sarawak were also drawn up.

The Third Malaysia Plan (1976), in planning Malaysia's development for the years 1976-80, also saw Bahasa Malaysia as the basis of integration through education. In Peninsular Malaysian schools at the time, former English medium schools had already been converted into Bahasa Malaysia medium schools. The Third Malaysia Plan indicated, therefore, that the educational systems in Sabah and Sarawak would be 'integrated with the National Education System by expanding the use of Bahasa Malaysia at the primary level' (Third Malaysian Plan, 1976:386).

The Third Malaysia Plan (1976:386) also stated that measures would be taken to adopt common syllabi at primary and secondary levels and teacher training institutions. The quality of teacher training was also to be improved and in-service courses in Bahasa Malaysia and English were to be provided. Also of interest was the new tone set regarding the role of English in society. The Third Malaysia Plan stated that although the teaching of Bahasa Malaysia was to continue to be 'vigorously' implemented, measures would be taken to ensure that the acquisition of English would not be sacrificed. This maintenance of English was to ensure that the nation would not be left behind in scientific and technological developments in the world nor be disadvantaged in international trade and commerce. While the Government will implement vigorously the teaching of Bahasa Malaysia, measures will be taken to ensure that English is taught as a strong second language. This is important if Malaysia is to keep abreast of scientific and technological developments in the world and participate meaningfully in international trade and commerce (Third Malaysia Plan, 1976:386).

The third Malaysia Plan also provided for the role to be played by the Curriculum Development Centre which was planned to be fully operational in 1977. It was planned that the Curriculum Development Centre, or CDC, would be responsible for initiating efforts to improve the curricula. As stated in the Plan, it would

spearhead efforts to improve the quality of education through the modification and development of science, mathematics, Bahasa Malaysia and English Language curricula, design effective methods for their teaching... and provide in-service training for teachers (Third Malaysia Plan, 1976:397).

This role was later defined in the Fourth Malaysia Plan (1981: 344) as being responsible for the 'systematic planning and development of the curricular [sic] at primary and secondary levels in all subjects except technical and vocational, health and Islamic studies'. The curriculum was thus presented as being the learning experience within each 'subject' area, rather than the curriculum being the total learning experience of the child.

The mid-term review of the Third Malaysia Plan (1979:197) assured the people that the overall shortage of teachers at the primary and lower secondary levels in Bahasa Malaysia, English, Science, and Mathematics was being gradually reduced by increases in the enrolments of teacher training colleges. In-service training of temporary teachers (non-certified teachers) was also being continued.

In line with the policy of producing bilinguals, the government continued to try to ensure that English proficiency would be maintained. The Mid-Term Review of the Third Malaysia Plan stated that the teaching of English as a second language would be intensified through various means. First, in-service courses would be stepped up.

The upgrading of teachers' proficiency in the teaching of English as a second language will be intensified through in-service courses at the Maktab Perguruan Bahasa (Language Teachers' College, formerly known as the Language Institute) and Faculty of Education and Language Centre of UM (Universiti Malaya) (Third Malaysia Plan Mid-Term Review, 1979:202).

This promise of a massive thrust in in-service teacher, education has yet to be seen.

Another project involved the employment of British teachers in local schools. The plan was that 'English language teachers recruited from the United Kingdom will be assigned to local schools to supplement local efforts' (Third Malaysia Plan Mid-Term Review, 1979:202). Also, 'research into aspects of the teaching of English as a second language will be conducted' (Third Malaysia Plan Mid-Term Review, 1979:202). Unfortunately, the influx of teachers under the CFBT scheme was viewed by educators as more of a political move rather than a sincere desire to raise the standard of English. As for research into the teaching of English as a second language in Malaysia, very little is in evidence that there was very much done to fulfill this promise.

One important aspect of the plans for the teaching of English was the idea of decentralization for ease of implementation. This led to the appointment of English language officers in all states. 'To ensure effective implementation' the plans laid out above were to be 'coordinated and supervised by English language officers at state and district levels' (Third Malaysia Plan Mid-Term Review, 1979:202).

The Fourth Malaysia Plan (1981:347) reported that, in the 1970s, 4,006 teachers had been trained to teach Bahasa Malaysia and 1,598 to teach English as a Second Language in the lower secondary. This number was in addition to those trained to teach in primary schools. Besides this pre-service training, in-service courses had also been conducted for Bahasa Malaysia and ESL teachers. These programmes to increase the number of Bahasa Malaysia and English teachers were in keeping with the plan for Bahasa Malaysia to be the main medium of instruction and English to be a strong second language.

By 1980, Bahasa Malaysia will be the main medium of instruction at upper secondary level in Peninsular Malaysia and Sabah. In Sarawak, it will be expanded to cover Standard IV at primary level.

By the end of the eighties, it will be the main medium of instruction at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels. The teaching and learning of Bahasa Malaysia, especially in Chinese and Tamil medium schools will be further improved through the provision of trained teachers. Measures aimed at strengthening the teaching of English as a second language will be continued. Towards this end, steps will be taken to ensure that more teachers will be trained in the teaching of English Language. Resource centres will be set up at the state level to ensure that schools are well equipped with teaching materials. In-service courses for English Language teachers will also be continued so as to enable teachers to use the latest teaching techniques and methods more effectively (Fourth Malaysia Plan, 1981:354).

In modern Malaysia, as mentioned in the Razak Report, it is vital that bilingualism be maintained. Chai Hon Chan (1977:46-7) pointed out in 1977 that while the medium of instruction in universities would be Bahasa Malaysia, supplementary reading would have to rely heavily on English language reference books.

Indeed, it is becoming clear that the new generations of students must have a good grasp of English as a second language if the quality of learning at the tertiary level, particularly in science and technology, is to be maintained let alone improved (Chai, 1977:46).

Chai predicted that the English educated would continue to maintain and transmit to their children whatever level of English they had and that the rich would continue to send their children overseas for education. As such,

children from presently English-speaking homes will probably be bilingual since English will be taught as a second language in the national schools and reinforced by English-language (albeit mainly American) movies through television and movie theatres, English-language newspapers and foreign reading materials. Thus, the English-speaking families will have an advantage over the others in equipping their children with a certain level of skill in English which, notwithstanding the central position of Bahasa Malaysia in public affairs may continue to have a decisive effect on educational mobility through tertiary education. A smaller proportion may be trilingual: Malay, English, and Chinese or Tamil (Chai, 1977:48).

The reinforcement by television is certainly true. A count of television time devoted to the various languages, done by the researcher between the period 24 April-5 May 1984, revealed that 4,695 minutes had been devoted to programmes in English; 3,635 minutes had been devoted to programmes in Bahasa Malaysia (including programme summaries for the day, Islamic prayers and hymns, and various announcements); 350 minutes had been devoted to Mandarin (two movies and about 15 minutes of news daily) plus 30 minutes devoted to one programme which was scripted in a mixture of Chinese dialects with phrases in Bahasa Malaysia thrown in; 320 minutes had been given to Tamil (two movies and about 15 minutes of news daily); 180 minutes (a movie and a mini-series) had been given to Arabic (excluding prayers which begin and end daily broadcasts); and 150 minutes had been in Hindi (one movie).

Summary

In sum, the British colonial government appeared to be confused as to educational policies, if any, in colonial Malaysia. Its concern was with the Straits Settlements. The British wanted to leave the Malay States as undisturbed as the British economic ventures would permit. Residents (or Governors) of the Malay States did as they pleased and each state developed according to the philosophy of each particular Resident.

Malay education in Perak and Selangor, for example, was far ahead of the other Malay States, with Perak even further ahead than Selangor. The situation was complicated even further because some states did not come under full British rule until later. In these states too there was a difference in progress. Johor, which had rulers who kept in close contact with British royalty and had a British adviser, was far ahead of other states like Kelantan, which had been under Thai rule, or even Sabah, which was under the British North Borneo Company, whose main purpose in being there was commercial, and not to develop the country. The Brookes who ruled Sarawak also had their own ideas about the 'natives' losing their culture and made hardly any attempt to develop education in Sarawak.

The result was differences in the standards of education among media of instruction as well as among the various states.

The former Straits Settlements of Penang, Singapore, and Malacca, which had an early start, have well-developed education systems. The same is true of the Malay States along the west coast of Peninsular Malaysia which also started Western education comparatively early. The north and east coast states of Peninsular Malaysia have not been so fortunate. Education and the value of education have had to be gradually developed. In most cases, this value is seen to be extrinsic rather than intrinsic. The motivation for education is chiefly instrumental, being useful only in that it permits better employment.

Differences in the education system have led to differences in job opportunities, which, in turn, have caused unpleasant feelings between the haves and the have-nots. The problem has been compounded because the states which are lagging behind have large Malay populations whereas the states with better schools and teachers have large Chinese populations.

For a time, too, the Colonial Office followed the recommendations of Sir Frank Swettenham and decided that English would not be taught to Malay children in rural areas. Instead a sub-standard primary Malay education was designed for Malay children to enable them to read, write, and count. Whereas Malay children in urban areas had the option of either attending English medium schools or attending Malay medium primary schools and moving into English medium secondary schools after their primary education, the rural children had no such choice and were forced to stop after the primary school because it had been decided for them that they did not want to continue. The same was true for Indian schools which were largely sub-standard and allowed to remain so.

Since an education in English opened up doors to the population and provided higher status employment, being deprived of English education also meant that rural pupils were being prevented from attaining higher status employment. This created further dissension in the country as slices of the economic cake began to be dealt out.

It is the writer's opinion that today, the acquisition of English is seen as a necessary evil by most of the community. This attitude spills over to the children in school, making it more difficult for them to

have any intrinsic desire to acquire English. It is a middle-class acquisition and to the middle class will go the spoils. Meanwhile, when we discuss falling standards, we need to seriously consider whether the standard of English has fallen in the country as a whole, or whether standards have fallen in the former English medium schools.

References

Asmah Hj. Omar (1974), *Essays on Malaysian Linguistics*, Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.

____ (1976), *The Teaching of Bahasa Malaysia in the Context of National Language Planning*, Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.

____ (1979), *Language Planning for Unity and Efficiency*, Kuala Lumpur: Penerbit Universiti Malaya.

____ (1980), 'Kedudukan Bahasa Inggeris Sebagai Bahasa Kedua Atau Bahasa Asing Dan Pengajaran Di Peringkat Sekolah Rendah', Paper presented at the Second Educational Seminar held at the Sultan Hassanal Bolkihah Teachers' College, Gadong, Brunei, 7 Dec. 1980.

Beebout, Harold Seymour (1972), 'The Production Surface for Academic Achievement: An Economic Study of Malaysian Secondary Schools', Ph. D. dissertation, The University of Wisconsin.

Chai Hon Chan (1977), *Education and Nation-building in Plural Societies: The West Malaysian Experience*, Canberra: The Australian National University.

____ (1978), 'Political Change, Education and Group Identity: Guyana and Malaysia', in R. Rotberg (ed.), *The Mixing of Peoples: Problems of Identity and Ethnicity*. Boston: Greylock.

Educational Planning and Research Division, Ministry of Education (1970), *Education in Malaysia*, Kuala Lumpur: Government Press.

Federation of Malaya (1951), 'Report of the Committee on Malay Education', Kuala Lumpur.

____ (1951), 'Chinese Schools and the Education of Chinese Malaysians: The Report of a Mission Invited by the Federation Government to Study the Problems of the Chinese in Malaya', Kuala Lumpur, June.

____ (1961), 'Report of the Education Review Committee 1960', Kuala Lumpur: Government of Malaya Press.

Goh Cheng Teik (1971), *The May Thirteenth Incident and Democracy in Malaysia*. Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press. pGovernment of Malaysia (1971), *Second Malaysia Plan, 1971-1975*, Kuala Lumpur: Government Press.

- ____ (1976), *Third Malaysia Plan 1976-1980*, Kuala Lumpur: Government Press.
- ____ (1979), *Mid-Term Review of the Third Malaysia Plan 1976-1980*, Kuala Lumpur: Government Press.
- ____ (1987), *Fourth Malaysia Plan 1981-1985*, Kuala Lumpur: National Printing Department.
- ____ (1986), *Fifth Malaysia Plan 1986-1990*, Kuala Lumpur: National Printing Department.
- Ibrahim Saad (1979), 'The Impact of National Medium Schools of Attitudes Related to National Integration in Peninsular Malaysia', Ph. D. thesis, University of Wisconsin-Madison.
- Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia (1979), *Laporan Jawatankuasa Kabinet Mengkaji Pelaksanaan Dasar Pelajaran*, Pengerusi YAB. Dato' Sen Dr Mahathir bin Mohamad, Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.
- Koh Eng Kiat (1967), *Education for Unity in Malaya*, Chicago, Illinois: National Sunday School Assn. Commission on Research in Christian Education.
- Kok Loy Fatt (1978), 'Colonial Office Policy Towards Education in Malaya, (1920-1940)', unpublished M. Ed. dissertation, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur.
- Pillai, M. G. G. (1973), 'The MCE Drama', in *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 80:17, April,
- Stevenson, Rex (1975), *cultivators and Administrators*, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press.
- Winstedt, A. O. (1932), 'The Educational System of Malaya', in *The International Year Book of Education 1931*, New York: Teachers' College.
- ____ (1943), 'Malaya', in *The Annal*, Vol. 226, May, p. 97-111. C.O. 273/502/56313/V5, Encl. 3, Winstedt's Memo, 30 September 1920.
- Wong, Francis (ed.) (1977), *Readings in Malaysian Education*, Kuala Lumpur: Penerbit Universiti Malaya,
- ____ and Ee Tiang Hong (1975), *Education in Malaysia*, Hong Kong: Heinemann Educational Books (Asia) Ltd.