

The Development of English Education in Kota Setar, 1909-1957

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Abstract

This research aims to study the development of English education in Kota Setar from 1909 to 1957. Before the colonization of the British, Kota Setar used informal education system. After the Bangkok Treaty 1909 was signed, Kedah was put under British influence. With that, the British have changed the administration system in Kedah especially in the English education in Kota Setar. This study uses qualitative methods by reference in libraries and archives. The information is obtained through primary and secondary sources. The primary source is from the analysis of documents such as the Annual Report, and Government Secretary (SUK) files from the National Archives. While the secondary sources obtained from scholarly papers from the National Archives, University of Malaya (UM), Sultan Idris Education University (UPSI) and National University of Malaysia (UKM). This study found that the British had made changes in English education and expanded English education in Kota Setar. Initially, Kota Setar implemented an informal and traditional education system such as indirect learning from *pondok* and mosques. After the British occupation, English education system has given the local community the opportunity in learning English to improve their standard of living. Therefore, the study was conducted to review the development of English education brought in by the British to help improve the state's administration as well as improving the standard of living of the local community in Kota Setar, Kedah.

Keywords: British Colonization, English Education, Traditional Education, Administration, Informal Education, Local Community, British Occupation.

Introduction

There is a lot of studies that has been conducted about English education in Malaya but mostly carried out only in certain states. This study emphasized the history of English education development in Kota Setar, Kedah from 1909 until 1957. English education in Kota Setar began in 1909 when the Government of the English School was established in Alor Setar on December 8, 1908, by Sheikh Ahmad and Mr. Richey. At the beginning of the establishment, the Government English School was located in a wooden house located between *Balai Nobat* and the High Court (Puteh, 1956). However, the Government English School in Alor Setar did

not have a qualified teacher. Thus, the British government took the initiative by asking a teacher from Penang Free School to teach in the Government English School. Due to a request from the British government, Penang Free School sent a senior assistant teacher, Ms. Mohamad Iskandar to become a teaching staff at the Government English School in Kota Setar. He graduated with the 'Normal Examination' in 1908 after attending the Normal Class taught by Mr. W. E. Maan in Penang (Iskandar, 1953). Despite that, the school did not get attention from the community in 1909 due to unfavorable prejudices against the Government English School, Alor Setar. This is because the Malays thought the adoption of English education will mislead their children during that time (Iskandar, 1953). Meanwhile, the Chinese community worried their children will be bullied by other ethnic groups in the English School because they are considered as a minority (Iskandar, 1953). After a while, the problem has been resolved and the English education has been accepted by the community in Kota Setar in line with the establishment of the English school for girls in 1924. It is clearly seen that the development of English education in Kota Setar grew rapidly.

Background Review

This study was carried out in Kedah Darul Aman located in the northern part of Peninsular Malaysia. Kedah was originally found by Maharaja Derbar Raja and name it "Kalaha" (Darus & Rashid, 1999). From a historical perspective, Kedah had undergone several events in defending its sovereignty from the Siamese and British threats and had to release Penang (1786M), Seberang Perai (1800M), Perlis and Setol which were part of the confiscated and separated from its political power (Documentary of the Kedah State Historical Convention, 1991).

This study emphasized in Kota Setar district that located in Kedah Darul Aman. Alor Setar is the capital, which located in Kota Setar district. Kota Setar name originally comes from the name of a tree that grows within the area called the Setar tree or its scientific name *Boueamacrophylla*. Alor Setar was founded on 15 Syaaban 1148 by Sultan Muhammad Jiwa Zainal Adilin Muazzam Shah II (1710- 1778) (Salleh, 1995). Kota Setar has an area of 66,470.80 hectares equivalent to 665 km². There are 28 districts in the Kota Setar district. In addition, Alor Setar has been the state's eighth administrative centre since the Sultanate of Kedah in 1136. The city is located at the junction of two Kedah River (Malek, 1998). The Royal Palace of Kedah is also located in the city of Setar and surrounded by tributary from Chegar Kechil river that run through the palace lush fruit trees (Darus, 2003). There are several knowledge centres that have emerged early in the Setar District in terms of English education.

The Siamese government ceded Kedah to the British in 1909 through the Bangkok Treaty of 1909 between the British and the Siamese. This agreement stated that the power to govern the State of Kedah was transferred to the British. The British occupation in Kota Setar has brought many changes in administration, socio-economy and education.

Problem Statement

The community in Kota Setar are less likely to send their children to English schools because they think English education can delude their children's faith. The Chinese community also afraid of racial discrimination in the English school. They feared other ethnic groups would abuse their children (Kee, Kedah State Archives). During the time, the Malays community worried their child affected by Christianity. The use of English school uniforms at

the time were also raises an issue for parents to send their children to English school. This has caused problems for the British government in developing English education in the Kota Setar district.

Methodology

This study was conducted using qualitative method using both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources obtained through documents and manuscripts from the Annual Report files, and the Government Secretary (SUK) files obtained from the National Archives. While secondary sources obtained from scientific writings, sources at local universities such as Sultan Idris Education University (UPSI), University of Malaya (UM), National University of Malaysia (UKM), Malaysia National Archives and also the National Archives of the Kedah / Perlis branch. All of the sources were analysed analytically and interpreted hermeneutically.

Kota Setar Education Policy

The Education Policy implemented by the British government was to continue with the pre-British policy that emphasized reading, writing and counting skills. However, the implementation that took place before 1909 did not have the same systematic arrangement as it did after 1909. After the British implement the new education system in Kedah, they appointed British officers from the Malayan Educational Service to hold the position of Superintendent Lessons.

Although the British ruled Kedah in 1909, the British officers did not have absolute authority over the administration. This is because the State Council is still under the control of the sultan and local officials. British officers only served as observers and advisers to the sultan and local officials in the state administration.

This was due to fears of the Kedah Government losing their power and sovereignty as a result of the presence of British Advisers in the country. Concern grew when there are rumours stating that the British want to include Kedah under the administration of Federated Malay States. Because of this, the political development aspect in Kedah occurred in 1909 to 1923 when the resistance continued against any attempt to convert Kedah into the Federated Malay States (Ahmad, 1981).

It also is associated with the Siam power handover on northern Malaya states to the British in 1909 without knowledge of the states, especially the Sultan of Kedah (Kedah Annual Report, 1909-1910). In the wake of these events, the Sultan of Kedah was unsatisfied with the 1909 Treaty. This is because there are no formal agreement agreed between Kedah and the British. However, on November 1, 1923 a formal treaty was signed, the Treaty of Friendship between Kedah and British. The treaty was made between Sir Lawrence Guilimard a British government representative who was Governor of the Straits Settlements with Tunku Ibrahim as the Regent representing the State of Kedah.

The details of the agreement show that the Sultan and the Chiefs still has the power in the state administration despite receiving the British Advisor. In addition, Kedah also promised not to be placed under the Federated Malay States and the Straits Settlements administration.

Before the treaty was signed in 1923, Tunku Ibrahim had drafted the constituent of the treaty to be brought to the meeting. However, these constituent are not disclosed in the terms of this agreement. However, the British agreed to the terms of the declaration by Tunku Ibrahim. According to the affidavit, the government of Kedah wanted to maintain the power in the state administration and receive British advisers. This situation is linked to the role of the British administration in expanding English education in Kedah. The affidavit highlighted that British Counselors will be sent to Kedah for the English education. This is to improve the standard of living of the local people. In the years between 1934 and 1937, the Education Superintendent made an important change in education policy at the time, Mr. E. La M. Stowell provides free primary education to all Malay schools and the closure of the lower classes in English schools (Zain, 1981).

Malaya education policies created by the British is aimed for maintaining the "status quo" community (Saad, 1981). Furthermore, the British have no desire to interfere with the values that exist in the society especially in the Malays society. Concerning education of the Malays, Philip Loh wrote that:

"Malay education was kept 'safely' within the framework of primary instruction and the confines of nineteenth century Malay Kampong economy. Education to preserve the stability of Malay Village life and economy because the major concern of policy" (Seng, 1969).

As a result, the British only provide education to the Malays only through reading, writing and counting that will make the Malays kids smarter than their parents (Sulaiman, 1994). The purpose of the learning is:

"Helps the boy to do and make the things he wants. Incidentally in doing and making, he develops his manual skill and acquires a certain attitudes of mind which can be developed is no other way. He gradually realise that skill of hand is an invaluable possession ...it is specially useful in developing self-reliance and will to preserve" (Kedah Secretary File, No.157/50).

To achieve the goal of this policy, the government has monitored every school in Kedah including Kota Setar district to ensure the education development. This education policy continued until the release of the Razak Report made by Tun Abdul Razak, the second Prime Minister of Malaysia. The director of Education stated in his report in 1920 that:

"Tujuan kerajaan bukanlah untuk mengeluarkan beberapa orang pemuda pemudi yang berpelajaran, atau beberapa orang pemuda yang kurang berpelajaran. Tetapi tujuannya ialah untuk memperbaiki keadaan hidup sebahagia besar penduduk (Melayu), supaya anak-anak nelayan atau petani akan menjadi nelayan dan petani yang lebih cerdas dari bapanya, dan supaya pendidikannya membolehkannya memahami bagaimana kehidupannya secocok dengan keadaan di sekelilingnya" (Hussin, 1996).

Based on the statement above, the British Government has played a key role in improving the standard of living among the local people and boosting the economy of the country. This is in line with the situation in Kota Setar in improving the standard of living of

the local people in order to serve in the administration of the British government. However, a number of factors limits the English education that took place in the early days. There are evidence of a limited policy that highlighted the administrators were often concerned about the employment of Western-educated youths and that they feared with the increasing facilities in English schools would result in political dissatisfaction (Phang, 1975).

One of the main reasons is the cost of English tuition is higher than the cost of regular vernacular schools. It is said that the cost of an English school student is three times higher than that of a regular vernacular student. Therefore, English lessons are limited to certain groups as well as those who can afford the fees.

After Japan lost World War 2 in 1945, the British government had come to Malaya to take over the administration. The British has implemented the same education policy during the Japanese occupation in Malaya. This policy continued until the introduction of the Razak Report in 1956. The Federal Legislative Council accepted the Razak Report on June 15, 1956 (Mahmud, Salleh & Harun, 2011). This report was made by Tun Abdul Razak who is the former second Prime Minister of Malaysia.

This report used as a national education policy that emphasizes all parties should use only one language to build a nation. The report also stated that the education policy must meet two requirements; to fulfill the aspirations of every major nation in the country and to ensures that every child born in the country has the right to receive education in any school according to their parents decision. (Hussin, 1996).

All of these policies are also used by English schools in Kota Setar. Although this policy changed during the occupation of Japanese in Malaya, but the major policies such as reading, writing and counting is still being carried out.

Establishment of English School in Kota Setar

The first English schools in Kota Setar was opened in 1908 named as Government English School or known as the Sultan Abdul Hamid College. The Establishment of English schools in Kedah varies from the Straits Settlements and the Federated Malay State which their English education developed by the missionaries. Compared to the State of Kedah where English schools were originally set up by the British government with its own purpose. The establishment of English schools in Kedah by the missionaries began in the early 1930s.

The forming of English education in Kota Setar began along with the opening of Kampong Baharu Girls' School or now known as the Sultanah Asma Secondary School in 1922. The development of English education in Kota Setar was further enhanced by the missionaries with the establishment of St. Nicholas and St. Michael school in in 1934.

However, the development of English education in the Kota Setar is closely linked to the economic and political factors of the British government in Kedah. Initially, English education was intended to provide employment opportunities in the British government sector. But, given the limited employment opportunities, the British government has decided that they only take students from the local nobility (Lee, 1972). Besides, the British

government also controlled by restricting the establishment of English schools to accommodate the colonial education policy.

The Purpose of English School Establishment in Kota Setar

In the early stages of the establishment of English schools in Kota Setar was due to the British government's urge to develop Kedah administration. The adoption of the modern education system is an important aspect of achieving the British government's aspirations. Through English education, the people of Kedah will be qualified to hold important positions in the state administration. This is because it aims to reduce the dependence on the services of British officers sent to the state.

On December 8, 1908, the education officer who is Sheikh Ahmad and assisted by Mr. Richey established a Government English School (GES) aiming to produce a trained workforce to improve the state administration quality (Rahman, 1997). At first, the Government English School in *Alor Setar* only accept students from the royal families and Kedah nobles only. There are only two schools for the ordinary citizens which is Jalan Baharu Malay School and Seberang Perak Girl's Malay School.

Also, the establishment of English education was aimed to educates the people to be involved in the administration Kedah. It aims to improve the lives of the people by enhancing the social and intellectual welfare of the people of Kedah. To achieve this, modern education must be adapted to the community especially in English education. Kedah government finally realize the importance of modern education to its people in improving their standard of living through modern education. Through education, the people began to realize that they were still colonized and had to fight to free themselves.

Furthermore, there are authors stated the last way to improve social welfare and to improve standard of living is through English education (Chan, 1967). This is because, English schools can produce an elite group who play an important role in the administration of the British government. These groups also play an important role in spreading and implementing colonial policies to the people of Kedah.

Generally, the establishment of English schools are focused on colonial interests. That's why most English schools are developed in urban areas. In connection with this, the establishment of English schools for girls in the Kedah was constructed in Kota Setar. This is because, Kota Setar was a state administrative centre with many facilities in that time.

However, the establishment of girl's English schools in Kota Setar is much later than the establishment English schools for boys. This is because due to the lack of awareness among the community at that time to provide modern education to their daughters. Basically, the community at that time thought that girls not require formal education. As a result, school for girls did not get support from the Malay community.

Despite the lack of encouragement, the government continued to set up an English school for girls. The government argues that there should be an English school for girls since there is an English school in Kota Setar.

The Purpose of Missionary English School Establishment in Kota Setar

There are two English schools were established during 1924 in Kota Setar. Both schools are known as the Government English School developed by the British government. However, there was no establishment of English schools by Christian missionaries until 1929. This is in contrast with the establishment of English schools by missionaries in other states. Establishment of English schools by missionaries began around 1930 in Kota Setar.

The delay in the establishment was due to lack of interest in English schools that run by priest among the local people in Kota Setar. This is because most of the local people who live in Kota Setar is Muslim. Additionally, the propaganda of Christianity in the English schools has given negative views by the local community. Table 1 showed the total of population in Kedah including Kota Setar.

Table 1

The total of population in Kedah, 1931

District	Malay	Chinese	Indian	Europe and Eurasian	Other and Malay Immigrants
<i>Kota Setar</i>	103,089	21,642	6,032	76+29	6,171+1,766
<i>Kubang Pasu</i>	39,312	6,118	2,219	17	2,676+319
<i>Kuala Muda</i>	35,888	15,678	16,288	133+41	701+904
<i>Padang Terap</i>	11,496	552	160	-	2,114+5
<i>Bandar Baharu</i>	12,274	8,247	4,948	36+12	47+493
<i>Kulim</i>	17,011	17,213	15,593	103+26	204+482
<i>Yan</i>	18,626	2,892	203	-	69+637
<i>Baling</i>	31,382	5,063	6,071	41	2,268+1,625
<i>Langkawi</i>	10,819	1,010	370	5	21+134

Source: C.A Vlieland, British Malaya- A Report on The 1931 Ceneus, The Crown Agent for The Colonies, Pg. 124-125

According to Table 1, the number of foreigners in Kota Setar has increased dramatically over the years. This is because Kota Setar is important in term of economic in the state of Kedah. Because of this, the missionaries wanted to establish the English schools Kota Setar. The first English school created by the missionaries was established during 1934 in Kota Setar. The school was named St. Nicholas Convent built on February 1934. In the same year, the Christian missionaries established another English school for boys known as St. Michael Institution. Out of the six English schools built by missionaries in Kedah, four were under the supervision of the Roman Catholic Mission and two were under the supervision of the American Methodist Mission (Kedah Annual Report, 1937-1938).

Among the goals of the establishment of English schools by Christian missionaries was to provide a comprehensive education to improve morale to a better degree based on Christian belief (Kee & Hean, 1972). In addition, the establishment of these schools showed three important factors, including religious transmission, language exchange, and the development of a new culture that suited the community (Long, 1997).

Through the existence of these schools, missionaries can easily spread the influence of Christianity to the local community. It is true that the purpose of the establishment of

English schools by the Christian missionaries was intended to spread Christianity as well as providing English lessons to the local community. This confirms that the Christian missionaries are using the education institutions as a tool to spread Christianity. Brian Holmes (1967) stated that "the policy of the missionaries was to convert people to Christianity and the school was agency of conversion".

The purpose of establishing English schools Kota Setar is to provide English lessons to the local community. This was due to the economic and political importance of the British government in Kota Setar. Students will be recruited to serve the British government as clerks in government departments to implement British administration policies on the local community after leaving the English schools. Hong Seng Ong (1952) wrote in his book:

"Matlamat pelajaran Inggeris adalah untuk menyediakan pelajar-pelajar dengan sijil Keperluan semua bidang pekerjaan di dalam kerajaan koloni dan Negara tempatan (native states) untuk jabatan perkeranian dan bidang perusahaan"

It can be concluded that the English schools that established by the British only concentrate in economic developed areas. This was supported by the limited number of the school that built by the British during the time.

The English School Syllabus

At the early stages of the English schools' development, the syllabus provided was not arranged properly to teach the students. This is because there are some problems faced by the Education Department including the shortage of English teachers. Thus, the school only taught to read and the meaning of English words.

After Mr. A. L. Stuart arrived in 1914 as education officer, he introduced a systematic syllabus for the English education. The new syllabus was the same as the Federated Malay States and the Straits Settlements. This systematic syllabus timetable also introduced timetable and examination system that used in English schools in Kota Setar.

This syllabus was formulated to achieve the British goal of producing a workforce to serve the British Government in education in Kota Setar. Among the subjects introduced are Bahasa Melayu, English, Geography, History, Mathematics, Algebra, Literature and Arts (Abdullah, 1994). Furthermore, Government English Schools also offer woodworking and handicraft subjects. The purpose of this course is to learn to handle and use their tools correctly by practicing (Kedah Secretary File, No. 2746/53). The school schedule was from 8.00 am to 12.00 pm and school days were from Monday to Friday (Zain, 1981).

The English school for girls in Kampung Baharu also offers the same subjects as the Government English School such as Bahasa Melayu, English, Geography, History, Mathematics, Algebra, and Literature. Nevertheless, students who are weak in their academics are trained in cooking and sewing (Zain, 1981).

The St. Michael School offers a level of education until ninth grade known as Cambridge Senior. The six subjects offered by the school are French, English, Hispanic, Science, English Literature and Arts (Zain, 1981). English is used as the delivery language for

all of the subjects excluding Bahasa Melayu. Also, Gospel and Scripture study is compulsory to Christians students while Muslim students are not required to take the class (Zain, 1981).

However, during the occupation of Japan from 1941 to 1945, most of these schools were closed and the Japanese government used these schools to teach Japanese language, songs and activities to show loyalty to the Japanese government and the Japanese Emperor (Hussin, 1996). After the defeat of Japan in 1945, the British Government took back Malaya and continued their education syllabus.

The syllabus designed by the British Department of Education is based on the subjects that are required to be taken in the Junior Cambridge and Senior Cambridge examinations. Those who pass the exams will get a job in the British administration (Zain, 1981). Those who graduated from Junior Cambridge were also offered a position in the British administration in Kota Setar.

Overall, the systematic syllabus was intended to provide education that would create a better job for the local community and could fill the British administrative service at that time. Besides, it also aims to make the children of the local community can get a better job compared to their parents.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the British Government drafted several policies to guide the development of English schools in achieving their goals in expanding English education in Kota Setar. The English schools in Kota Setar were established gradually. Apart from that, the English schools established by the British Government and Christian missionaries were emphasized for the development of English education in Kota Setar.

Issues that being raised during the establishment of Government English School was well resolved by the British Government such as the lack of English teachers. The British Department of Education has also set up syllabus for English schools in Kota Setar based on the subject requirements for taking the Junior Cambridge and Senior Cambridge exams. It is clearly seen that British Government's played an important role to improve the standard of living of the community in Kota Setar.

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