

THE DEVELOPMENT OF MALAY VERNACULAR
EDUCATION IN SARAWAK
1841-1941

Sabihah bt. Osman

Malay-Muslim society in Sarawak, like its counterpart elsewhere in Southeast Asia, had its own traditional system of education before the 'secular' type of education was introduced to Sarawak in the late nineteenth century. Low in his book *Sarawak* published in 1848 mentioned that, "many schools are established in Sarawak for the education of the children. The sons only are educated in those establishments, which are generally kept by priests: their course of instruction comprises of reading and writing of their own language, the reading of the Koran in Arabic and the repetitions of the various forms of prayer enjoined by the Mohamedan religion."¹ In this traditional system of education, Malay-Muslim boys aged between five and seven were sent to a Quran teacher. There were two types of Quran schools. The most common one was the class held in the house of the religious teacher, normally in the small villages. In large villages, classes were normally conducted in the *surau* or on the verandah of the mosque. The second type known as *pondok* schools were found only in the Northern states of Malaya, Kedah, Kelantan and Trengganu. There is no evidence to suggest that the schools existed in Sarawak.² Apart from teaching pupils how to read and recite the Quran, the Quran school also taught the pupils Malay-Muslim manners and ethics. After completing the period at school their education continued in the form of socialisation through observing and assisting their parents, relatives and others in the performance of the daily tasks of the house and village, for instance in the fields of agriculture, fishing and handicrafts. A few lucky ones would further their studies in order to become religious officials. Usually some, who had the opportunity to make the pilgrimage to Mecca, would continue their studies. When they came back, they were considered qualified to be religious officials and were highly respected.

1

H. Low, *Sarawak: Its Inhabitants and Production being Notes during a Residence in that country with H.H. The Rajah Brooke*, Bentley, London, 1848, p.138.

2

Khoo Kay Kim, "Malay Society, 1874-1920s" *JSEAS*, Vol. No. 2, September 1974, p. 179-198.

THE FOUNDATION OF THE MALAY VERNACULAR SCHOOLS

The foundation of the Malay vernacular schools under the Brooke regime could be traced back to a discussion in one of the 'evening parties' held in the Astana. Having learnt of the Malay women's interest in hearing folktales and legends given by reciters, Margaret Brooke, Charles Brooke's wife, decided to start parties of recitation at the Astana. After one of these parties she suggested that women should learn to read and write Malay. The idea was first rejected by Datu Isa, the Datu Bandar's wife, who claimed that,

Writing amongst women is a bad habit, a pernicious custom; Malay girls would be writing love letters to clandestine lovers, and undesirable men might come into contact with the daughters of our house. ...³

But eventually, encouraged by Margaret's initiative to study Malay language with Encik Sawal, a Malay scholar,⁴ Datu Isa relented and allowed her married daughters-in-law to attend the class. In her comment about the progress of the class later, Margaret said, "we had great fun over our lesson and after some time, Daieng Sahada (Datu Isa's daughter-in-law) began to write almost better than ... Inchi Sawal himself ..."⁵ According to Margaret, Daieng Sahada herself "commenced to describe the history of Sarawak ... in poetry and played a prominent part in the education of her sisters". In the end she and her husband, Abang Kasim, the future Datu Bandar, together with Raneé Margaret, opened a school for women and young boys in Datu Bandar's house. As time went by the class became too big for the size of the Datu's house, and moved by this enthusiasm Charles Brooke helped to build a school. Hence, the first Malay vernacular school was established in Sarawak in 1883 (after forty two years under Brooke rule).

Abang Kassim's school, later known as Kampong Jawa School, was officially opened on 21st June, 1983. The school received government subsidies and the salaries for teachers were provided by the government. The first class consisted of 70 boys normally

3

The Raneé (Margaret) of Sarawak, *My Life in Sarawak*, Methuen, London, 1913, pp. 159.

4

Encik Sawal worked as a Malay writer under James Brooke and taught Malay to a number of European government officers. He was considered the chief local authority on Malay learning because of his wide knowledge of Arabic and Malay literature.

5

Margaret Brooke, *My Life*, p. 162.

drawn from the nearby villages. By 1889 there were already 117 pupils in the school.⁶

Encouraged by the progress made in Abang Kasim's school, Encik Bakar, son of Encik Boyang, a Malay scholar, opened a Malay vernacular school in Kampong Gersik. Bakar was born in Kuching in 1853. His father came from Kayong, Sumatra and settled in Kuching as court interpreter and later became head of the Customs Department. It was Boyang's house in which the first Rajah initially took refuge during the first occupation of the town in the Chinese Rebellion of 1857.⁷ Bakar also served as a court interpreter and head of the Customs Department. When the Kampong Gersik school was opened he became the headmaster. Then he was appointed as Tua Kampong of Kampong Gersik and member of the Supreme Council and the Council Negri. He was also the owner of two schooners which traded with Sumatra and Java. After Sawal's death Bakar was the leading Malay intellectual in Kuching. According to Margaret Brooke he used his house as a meeting place for the more educated Malays of Kuching. As a knowledgeable person, "one can talk to him almost on any subject, for he reads and writes English as well as most Englishmen". He married into the aristocracy, a close relative of Datin Isa.⁸ He died in 1928.

In order to ensure regular attendance in both schools religious teaching was offered as the main part of the curriculum in the morning. Besides religious instruction, pupils were also taught Malay reading and writing in 'Jawi' and romanised Malay, elementary arithmetic and geography. In 1888 the Kampong Jawa School began offering English. (Before that time students who wished to learn English had to go to the mission schools in Kuching as part-time students). An English teacher, John Lewis, from the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG) school in Kuching, came to teach English three times a week at the Kampong Jawa School.⁹ English was also introduced as a subject to Kampong Gersik School. By 1894 the majority of the boys of both schools studied English since it was intended by the government to train prospective clerks and Malay school teachers.

6

Sarawak Gazette (SG.) May 1, 1883 and *SG* August, 1889.

7

SG June 20, 1930.

8

Margaret Brooke, *My Life*, pp. 164-165.

9

SG November 1, 1988.

However, in spite of these efforts, the numbers of students attending both schools declined considerably by 1897. This was probably caused by the lack of interest of the parents in their children's 'secular' education and the lack of cooperation between parents and teachers to encourage students to go to school. In 1908 it was obvious that some of the current students went instead to the Government Lay School which was opened in 1903 (see Table 1). As a result the government carried out an investigation into this problem — lack of interest and other difficulties faced by the vernacular schools in Sarawak. The officer in charge of the enquiry, J.E.A. Lewis, commented in his report that too many standards with a small number of students in every class caused inefficiency in the administration and teaching of the vernacular schools. The standard of English and Malay taught in the vernacular schools was very low.¹⁰ To solve the problem the officer concerned suggested that the government should reduce the number of classes so as to ensure the smooth and effective running of the schools' administration.¹¹

TABLE 1. The Enrolment of Kampong Jawa School and Kampong Gersik School since 1883.

Year	Kampong Jawa School	Kampong Gersik School	Total
1883	70	-	70
1889	117	-	117
1894	112	56	168
1897	89	41	130
1908	67	57	124

Sources: *Sarawak Gazette (SG)* May 1, 1883, August 1, 1894, July 1, 1897 and July 1, 1908.

Prior to the setting up of Kampong Jawa School, the Anglican mission had operated Malay-medium secular classes in the late 1840s and early 1850s. But they were never very successful since the Malay parents were generally afraid that Christian-sponsored schools would corrupt the Islamic faith of their children.¹² In the 1860's and 1870's

¹⁰ *SG* August 1, 1917.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² P.D. Varney, "The Anglican Church in Sarawak from 1848 to 1852", *SMJ*, Vol. XVI, Nos. 32-33, July-December, 1968, p. 385.

a few short-lived Malay schools were set up by the Malay scholars, such as that of Encik Boyang at Kampong Gersik, Kuching in the 1860's. In 1873 the Colonial Directory listed Datu's school as one of the educational institutions in Kuching. As the name indicated, the school was possibly sponsored by one of the local Datus and situated at the Kampong Datu. At about the same time, in the early 1870's, the Sarawak Rangers organised a day school for their Malay and Dayak members. Both Malay and English were taught. By 1876, 34 Rangers were literate in Malay and four in English, out 150 members.¹⁴

However, none of these schools survived very long since secular education did not attract the Malay-Muslim parents. They regarded education as a matter for the Muslim religious authority; whereas at that time mission schools (Christian) had been well established in Sarawak particularly in Kuching. In relation to this development the *Sarawak Gazette (SG)* noted in 1877 the educational monopoly of the missions and called for the establishment of some local Malay schools, "... where Malays ... can get such an education as may be practically useful. Such a school must be free of all suspicious of proselytism or it would be empty..."¹⁵

CHARLES BROOKE'S EDUCATION POLICY AND THE GOVERNMENT LAY SCHOOL

In order to understand how the Government Lay School was established, we have to refer to the education policy of Charles Brooke. Charles Brooke had his own ideas on education. Through his pamphlet, *Queries*,¹⁶ he had indicated his disagreement with the education policy which had been implemented by the Dutch and British colonial governments in their colonies in Southeast Asia and Africa. He was of the opinion that a successful colonial government was one which would be knowledgeable in the local native language and custom. Through experience and judging by what was happening in India and the Philippines at that time, he realized the effect of western education on the natives. Although he admitted the importance of education, he also believed that education would

13

The Colonial Directory 1873, p. L3.

14

SG January 3, 1876 and *SG* March 15, 1877.

15

SG March 15, 1877.

16

Charles Brooke, *Queries, Past, Present and Future*, The Planet, London, 1907.

have bad effects on the natives. Hence he made sure that his education policy in Sarawak was in accord with his personal beliefs. His attitude could be seen through his criticism of mission education in Sarawak which were voiced in the editorial of the *Sarawak Gazette*. For instance the *SG* in reply to one of the critics of Government policy on education argued that it was useless to be literate in mission schools if the students did not know how to grow padi.¹⁷ In other words the government wanted an education system which could equip, "happy, healthy and contented youth for an agricultural life." Thus Charles Brooke had made the point earlier that his policy was to impose sensible limits on the process of education. He said,

Education, if well adapted, I do not dispute, is a real benefit, though it probably may have the effect of causing native races to become formidable opponents to the European Governments scattered over the world, as the Philippines were to the Spanish Government. Education is the principle factor of revolution, and no Mrs Partington's mop can check the wave.¹⁸

With regard to the nature of mission education he did not agree with the policy of putting too much emphasis on academic and English subjects. In actual fact Charles Brooke's attitude towards education was 'ambivalent', the product of conflicting emotions. As stated by Pringle, Charles Brooke believed that education was a worthwhile and growing force in the world but at the same time he also knew that western education was bound to erode the native cultures which he admired.¹⁹ His view was well illustrated in *Queries*. Among other things he agreed.

Our system of education is just the reverse of what it should be. We stuff natives with a lot of subjects that they don't require to know and try to teach them to become like ourselves, treating them as if they had not an original idea in their possession.²⁰

To put his education theory into practice he set up a Government Lay School in Kuching in 1903. This school was established with the idea of giving a vernacular and practical education to Malays, Chinese and Indians. But under this system of education no provision was made to include the non-Malay native population. Charles Brooke believed that since the latter (the Dayaks)

17
SG March 1, 1923.

18
C. Brooke, *Queries*, pp. 11-12.

19
R. Pringle *Rajahs and Rebels*, p. 139.

20
C. Brooke, *Queries*, p. 4.

possessed no literate culture, any training based on literacy was therefore bound to be subversive of the particular genius.²¹ In 1982 he commented,

We find that their senses or natural facilities are not rendered any more acute by education. In fact, the contrary may be the case. The memory of the Dayak is wonderfully retentive and accurate; a Dayak can remember the history of his ancestors related by word of mouth from father to son for centuries back, and no doubt this retentiveness is produced greatly by not being able to take notes in writing, if a Dayak walks in the jungle his eyes and ears hear and observe things most accurately, to the minutest sounds of birds and insects.²²

Yet in his book *Ten Years in Sarawak*, he mentioned the possibility of carrying on a system of modern government schools for some Dayaks to be located in the interior.²³ However, this idea was never implemented. Instead Charles Brooke left Dayak education entirely in the hands of the Roman Catholic Mission (RCM) and the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel Anglican Mission (SPG) which received certain amounts of small government subsidies. Since most of the mission schools were concentrated in Kuching, the majority of students attending were not Dayaks but Chinese. For instance in 1871 the Chinese comprised the largest group in St. Thomas' School, about 88 per cent of the total.²⁴ In a way this policy indirectly contradicted Charles Brooke's belief, as noted in *Queries*, that mission schools should not stuff Asian students "with a lot of subjects that they do not require to know...".

The Government Lay School was built in 1903 with the intention of serving as a model for future educational development. That is why Charles Brooke originally named the school, the Sarawak National College.²⁵

His aim was to have each class and race taught their own language, to read and write it correctly before taking up any other language, such as English. He looked on it as being absolutely necessary to include and instill in each class or race a respect for their own manners and customs before embracing those of other countries; the pride of race, he considered, should be held by all as sacred to the memory of their ancestors and forefathers.²⁶

21

Pringle, *Rajah and Rebels*, p. 139.

22

SG October 1, 1892 cited in Pringle, *Rajahs and Rebels*, p. 139.

23

C. Brooke, *Ten Years*, Vol. II, p. 326.

24

SG January 24, 1871.

25

C. Brooke, *Queries*, p. 4.

26

SG July 1, 1904.

The school was totally secular in character and again it put much emphasis on vernacular education and the elementary learning of trades like engineering, surveying (elementary) carpentry and shoe-making, with English as an optional subject. Gardening was under the charge of the Public Works Department. In June 1915 it was reported that "a Malay School working party consisting of 20-25 boys was doing the gardening, measuring the grounds and growing plants...the government provided the equipment".²⁷ Thus the curriculum was more or less the same as in other vernacular schools in Malaya and Sabah which provided elementary education.²⁸ However, in Malaya the government separated the schools according to their medium of instruction, such as Malay vernacular school for Malays, Chinese vernacular school for Chinese and Tamil vernacular school for Indians. In Sarawak however, there was only one school catering for the three media of instruction, Malay, Chinese and Tamil, though in different classes. This was probably because the Brookes did not want to spend more money or perhaps they believed in putting all races together in one school. As a start the school took in about 98 students: 60 Malays, 30 Chinese and 8 Tamil. Twenty Chinese students came from the Mission Schools (see Table 2).

TABLE 2. The Number of Students at GLS by Ethnic Group, 1904-1921

Year	Total	Chinese	Malay	Indian	Javanese
1904	103	40	55	8	-
1905	102	30	60	12	-
1906	-	-	43	-	-
1908	105d	39	51	13	-
1910	119	69a	44	6	-
1911	200	128a	66	6	-
1915	237	174a	63b	-	-
1917	138	75	50	6	7
1921	63	-	48c	4	11

a - includes females

b - includes Indian and Japanese

c - includes one Arab

d - includes two Eurasians

Sources: SG August 2, 1904; August 2, 1908; July 1, 1908; July 1, 1910; July 1 1911; July 1, 1915; August 1, 1917; December 1, 1921.

27

H.H.R.'s (Charles Brooke) Letters April, 1883 - November 1915 in letter June, 1915. p. 187.

28

D.D. Chelliah, *A Short History of the Educational Policy of the Straits Settlements*, Princeton University Press 1960, p. 27.

Since the school laid greatest stress on secular education the number of students in the Malay section began to decline in 1906. Quite a number came in 1904 and 1905, probably due to initial eagerness and encouragement by the Rajah. But once the parents knew that the school concentrated only on secular education, they started to withdraw from the school. Hence a decision was made in 1906 to allow Malay students to attend religious classes at Kampong Jawa and Kampong Gersik Schools in the morning. As a result the Government Lay School could only begin at 9.30 am. The problem regarding religious instruction was solved only for sometime; for 1921, five years after the introduction of the religious teaching, the number of Malay students who attended the GLS was less again; almost as low as in 1908 and 1910.

In the Chinese section, after 1915 the enrolment began to drop abruptly, though the Chinese students between 1910 and 1915 had formed the majority in the schools. The decline in numbers enlisted in this section was due to lack of confidence in the teaching of English in GLS. English was taught only as one of the subjects in the school curriculum. Moreover most of the rich Kuching Chinese preferred to send their children to mission schools where English was used as a medium of instruction. Secondly, the Chinese preferred to set up their own schools. So after 1915 each speech group began establishing their own schools. Charles Brooke in his address during the Speech Day of the Government Lay School in June 1916 criticized this attitude.²⁹ As a result of the poor response from the Chinese community, the Chinese section of the school was closed in 1920. The Tamil section had already been abolished in 1911 due to lack of enrolment and the remaining Indian students were transferred to the Malay section.³⁰ Thus only the Malay section managed to survive until 1930. With the closing down of those two sections, Chinese and Indian, it could be said that Charles Brooke's ideal school failed. In the end the school became solely a Government Malay vernacular school.

The failure of GLS led the government to amalgamate the remaining Malay section of GLS and Kampong Jawa School in order to form one of the most important Malay educational institutions in Sarawak during the Brooke period. The Maderasah Melayu or the Malay College of Sarawak, as it was named, was founded in 1931 with the aim,

29

SG July 1, 1916.

30

SG July 1, 1911.

to help the Malay to help himself by fitting him to take an active and useful part in the life of his own community. At present it must be admitted that in Sarawak the average young Malay is ill-prepared to face competition in the struggle for existence which modern conditions render inevitable. Whether the average Native benefits from learning English is open to doubt; we think that in all except a few cases he does not, but that he would certainly benefit from a course in Malay ... The effect of taking a ... Malay and teaching him only English is to turn him into something dangerously akin to the Indian 'failed B.A.' When he leaves school he fails to get a clerkship and then trouble starts ... he is fit for nothing at all. He abandons the dress and customs of his race, apes Europeans, and in all too many instances becomes a nuisance to himself, family and community ... The new Malay College is the answer ... It is hoped that students will either return to their homes well fitted to get down to work, with no false ideas of superiority, or else will go to the outstations as teachers.³¹

This new phase of development of the Malay school was introduced in order to produce a 'moderately' educated peasant or fisherman as in Malaya. It was also in line with the policy of Vyner Brooke, the third Rajah, who put more emphasis on the Malay-oriented character of his administration. In fact his policy had been stated in his speech in the General Council in 1927, four years before the Maderasah Melayu was formed. Among other things he said,

The problem is to think out the kind of education best adapted to the needs of Sarawak and the best means of providing it ... A sum of \$150,000 has been spent ... on grants-in-aid to schools, and a scheme for establishing a central government's school in addition to existing lay schools is now under consideration.³²

Although as stated above the Government Lay School did not survive, the government set up a kind of central school, the Maderasah Melayu. In actual fact the Maderasah was formed through a merger of Kampong Jawa School and Government Lay School. The Maderasah as noted by SG of March 1931 provided a course of higher Malay studies, native handicrafts, elementary agriculture, hygiene, elementary engineering and elementary surveying. However, no English would be taught in the College (Maderasah). Higher Malay studies here was probably meant to follow the Sultan Idris Training College (SITC) style of course, but it was not as advanced as the SITC curriculum. By "paying special attention"³³ to native handicrafts, elementary agriculture (gardening) and hygiene, the curriculum was in line with what had been implemented in Malaya by R.O Winstedt's 'rural-bias' policy which

31

SG March 2, 1931.

32

Brooke Papers Box 1, Vol. 26.

33

SG March 2, 1931.

stressed more on keeping the Malays on the land. Winstedt had reduced the duration of schooling from a possible five year period to a maximum of four, on the grounds that a fifth year had in the past tended to foster aspirations among pupils of becoming clerks. Therefore the duration of schooling was the same as the duration of schooling in other Malay schools in Sarawak, except the Maderasah, which offered a much more advanced course of Malay studies up to standard six (six years in school). Apart from preparing students to become better 'farmers' and 'fishermen' and to train some Malays to be native officers and potential Malay school teachers, towards the end of Brooke's rule, an English section was introduced to the College. In 1939 it started a special English class for Malay students who had passed special entrance examinations in standard four Malay schools in Sarawak to qualify them to



Datin Isa, wife of Datu Bandar, Bua Hassan and children.



Dayang Sahada (1890)

study in the English medium class of the College.³⁴ The first batch admitted in this way consisted of 30 students.³⁵

34

Report of the Committee on Malay Education, Federation of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, 1951, p. 4. Among other things it said, "While Malay children may at the age of six enter the English schools direct into the first year class, the more normal channel is via standard IV (Boys) and standard III (Girls) in the Malay vernacular schools to the special Malay classes ... Pupils who have passed the standards referred to, and who are under eleven years of age, are selected by examination results and generally interviewed for admission as free pupils to the special classes, which provide intensive training in English."

35

Interviews with five former students from the special English class. On 28th November 1973, the following were interviewed: Karim Abol, Secretary to the Public Commission, Mazlan Hj. Hamdan, Clerk of Council, Sarawak Council Negri, Hanis Mali, Chairman of the Housing and Development Commission, in Kuching. In Kuching also, Hasbee Sulaiman, Youth and Sport Officer, was interviewed on 29th November, 1973 and Ismail Hassan, Radio Malaysia Sarawak was interviewed on 2nd December, 1973.



Ranee Margaret, Mrs. Maxwell and Malay ladies.

Ikhsan: Lockard, C. and Saunders, G.E. *Old Sarawak a pictorial study*, Borneo Literature Bureau, Kuching, 1972.

The first enrolment of the College in 1931 comprised 280 boys, but by 1933 the number had shot up to 400.³⁶ At about the same time a small number of Malay schools were built in Kuching. The first was the Merpati Jepang School which was situated on the Datu's Peninsula (Kampong Datu) and opened in 1930 with 90 students.³⁷ The second was Sekolah Permaisuri, the first Malay Girls' School, opened at Kampong Satok in 1930 under the patronage of Datu Bandar Abang Abdillah. This school was the only Malay Girls' School in Sarawak during the Brooke period.³⁸ Then in 1931 Inchi (Mister) Boyang School was opened in Kampong Ulu Sungai Bedil, Kuching, to serve the north bank boys above the Astana, while

36

SG July 1, 1931, SG February, 1, 1933.

37

SG January 1, 1933.

38

SG December 2, 1929 and SG August 1, 1930.

Kampong Gersik School which was located on the same bank of the river was meant for boys living in Kampongs downriver from the Astana. In the 1930s Malay vernacular education began to develop, not only in respect of the number of schools involved, but also in terms of the number of students. By 1933 there were about 500 students in the Malay schools. This was about three times more than the 1921 figure (157 students) (see Table 3).

TABLE 3. Enrolment at Malay Schools in Kuching

Year	Kg. Jawa School	Kg. Gersik School	Govt. Lay School	Total
1883	70	-	-	70
1889	117	-	-	117
1894	112	56	-	168
1906	80	31	60	171
1908	67	57	51	175
1910	43	52	50	145
1915	103	60	63	226
1921	61	32	64	157

SG May 1, 1883, SG August 1, 1889, SG August 1, 1894, SG June 2, 1906, SG July 1, 1910, SG July 1, 1915, SG November 1, and December 1, 1921 cited in C.A. Lockard, "The Southeast Asian Town in Historical Perspective: A Social History of Kuching, Malaysia", University of Wisconsin, Ph. D. 1973, p. 400.

Despite the incentives given to the Malay schools between 1881 and 1921, and notably by teaching English in preparation for clerkships and other posts in the government, the enrolment in them fluctuated and sometimes declined. This was due to a number of reasons. For one thing the number of government posts was limited and these were normally reserved for those from the 'upper class'. Some parents also tended to withdraw their children before they had completed their studies. They felt that it was not worth completing the full school course since most of them would go back to their kampongs as farmers and fishermen. Without education their children could still be good farmers and fishermen.³⁹

MALAY VERNACULAR SCHOOLS OUTSIDE KUCHING

As in Kuching, the traditional Malay-Muslim education had already existed in Malay-Muslim society outside Kuching before the

coming of Brooke. Although Hugh Low, in describing the traditional Malay-Muslim education in Sarawak, did not mention directly the traditional Malay schools in other parts of Sarawak, he did write that 'Arab' chief of Krian, Imam Mulana, decorated his tumble-down audience hall at Kabong with "several verses from the Koran in large Arabic characters."⁴⁰

Outside Kuching, Malay vernacular schools began to develop under the Brooke government in the early twentieth century. In the second Division the first government Malay School was opened in 1903 in Simanggang and was called Abang Aing School (named after a senior native officer in Simanggang). Like other Malay schools in Sarawak at that time, it provided a primary education up to standard four. According to two of the former students, Penghulu Haji Mohd. Terang and Cikgu Mohamad bin Bujang,⁴¹ the curriculum taught was as usual, the 3RS, gardening and native handicrafts. It was of rather a low standard. Nevertheless, the good students could further their education in Maderasah Melayu, Kuching. One good example was Cikgu Mohamad bin Bujang who studied at the school in 1926-1930. In 1931 he was sent to the Maderasah for three years to be trained as a Malay school teacher. As his progress was good, he was successfully selected as one of the teacher trainees to be sent to SITC, Tanjong Malim, Malaya.

In Bintulu, the first Malay school was opened in 1912 when 45 students enrolled. But after a while the school had to be closed because it did not have enough students to fill the basic requirement of 15 students. In 1917 it was reopened with a new shift of emphasis in the curriculum to practical subjects such as basic fishery techniques, methods of cultivating sago and extracting jelutong rubber (a form of wild rubber for export to foreign countries). These new kinds of subjects successfully attracted to a number of students.⁴² By 1930 the number enrolled had gone up to 115 (the figures between 1917 to 1929 are not available). Apart from Bintulu, the government also set up schools at Oya and Mukah. In Oya the school was opened in 1912, but progress was not encouraging. The school attendance became irregular and decreased.⁴³ In Mukah however,

40

Low, *Sarawak*, pp. 352.

41

Interview with Haji Mohamad bin Bujang on December 1, 1973 in Simanggang and interview with Penghulu Haji Mohamad Terang on December 10, 1973 also in Simanggang.

42

SG August 1, 1917.

43

SG March 2, 1931.

the attendance was fairly satisfactory.⁴⁴

In Sadong the first Malay school was opened in 1925. The number of students enrolled was 37.⁴⁵ Then in 1929 the government set up a school in Bau. The first enrolment was 187 Malay students and a few Chinese students.⁴⁶ But both schools did not last long because of the lack of response (see Table 4).

TABLE 4. The number of students enrolled in some of the schools outside Kuching, 1924.

Place	Students
Simanggang	34
Sebuyou	43
Spaoh	22
Betong	24
Kabong	18
Saratok	12
Total	151

Sources: *SG* September 1, 1924.

As in Kuching before the 1930s the Malay vernacular schools outside Kuching faced the same problem. The enrolment of the students tended to fluctuate and gradually declined. For instance Betong and Spaoh schools are closed in 1931 due to the lack of response from the parents. Nevertheless, the Simanggang and Sebuyou schools made progress because the number of students enrolled had gone up to 294 in 1932. In general, however because of the late start in introducing schools, the lack of familiarity with the new system among the local people, and the slow pace of development in the interior, the rate of increase for the schools outside Kuching was low.

MALAY GIRLS' SCHOOL

Although the idea of opening a Malay vernacular school came from the women during one of their 'evening parties' at the Astana in the 1880's,⁴⁷ it was not until 1930 that a Malay Girls' School was

44

Ibid

45

SG June 1, 1926.

46

SG September 1, 1924.

47

M. Brooke, *My Life*, pp. 158.

opened. Girls were not encouraged to go to school. Nevertheless, Datu Isa, after some hesitation, in the 1880s encouraged and allowed her married daughters and daughters-in-law to join Margaret Brooke in her Malay class at the Astana. Then her daughter-in-law, Daeing Sahada, and Daeing Sahada's husband, together with Margaret Brooke, opened a school for women and young boys in her house, but when the school began, it was restricted to boys only. Looking at the progress achieved by women and the efforts made by them, especially by Daeing Sahada and Encik Bakar's wife, for the education of women in Kuching, the Datu Muda, Abang Kasim (Daeing Sahada's husband) suggested the founding of a girls' school in Kuching in 1894.⁴⁸ Unfortunately the suggestion never materialised until Abang Abdillah, Abang Kasim's son raised the issue again in his address to the GLS on Speech Day in 1925.⁴⁹ Like his father he was also interested in fostering girls' education. He himself was one of the first Malay to study in St. Thomas' Mission School in Kuching. Before taking up a government post as a surveyor, he was a Malay school teacher at Kampong Jawa School. After holding several posts in the government service as overseer and police inspector, finally in 1924 he was appointed as Datu Bandar.

Before the Malay Girl's School, Sekolah Permaisuri, was built at Kampong Satok, the school was conducted at Datu Bandar's house from 1926 to 1930. Besides teaching the 3R's, the school concentrated on domestic science subjects like needlework, cookery and other handicrafts. By 1933 the school had about 50 students.⁵⁰ Although the school was small, it made progress under a very capable headmistress, Cikgu Lily Eberwein.⁵¹ Throughout the period of Brooke's rule, Sekolah Permaisuri remained the Malay Girls' School in the state. Nevertheless, in many boys' schools a certain proportion, about one fifth of the students, were girls. Hammond in his report on education in Sarawak in 1937 commented that as the number of girls was small, their interests were generally neglect-

48

SG December 1, 1894.

49

SG October 1, 1955.

50

SG June 3, 1933.

51

Lily Eberwein is the Kuching-born daughter of a Eurasian father and Malay mother, but she is a Muslim and is considered as a member of the Malay community. She studied at St. Mary's School Kuching and Raffles' School, Singapore. Interview with her on November 26, 1973 in Kuching.

ed.⁵² Furthermore, he believed that it was of great importance that efforts should be made to increase the number of girls attending school and to open more schools for girls only. He suggested that where there were enough girls to open a class, as in Saratok Boys' School and Paloh Boys' School, a separate class for girls should be set up as the nucleus of a girls' school. Bearing this in mind, he made a suggestion that Madrasatul Sibuyau, Miri, should be continued as a Girls' School after the boys in that school had been transferred to the Anchi Government School.⁵³

With regard to the negative attitude of the people towards girls' education, Hammond felt that much could be done to overcome the prejudice of these people through the persuasive efforts of native officers and leading natives. It was up to local initiative through native officers and tua kampongs to arouse the interest of their people in girls' education. Even in Kuching he believed that there was a demand for two other girls' schools though such a demand was never publicly voiced.

THE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT AND EDUCATION EXPENDITURE

The Education Department was set up in 1924 with the aim of supervising the running of the schools in Sarawak. From that moment the government made a point that every school in Sarawak had to be registered with the Department. The Department was responsible for the supervision and inspection of the discipline of those schools, and seeing that every grant-in-aid or government subsidy was used properly.⁵⁴

Before the establishment of the Department Malay vernacular schools were only given a certain amount of subsidy from the government. Since the amount was not enough to cover the annual expenses, a small subscription was collected from the students. But when the schools were put under the Department the charging of private fees was abolished.

The first Director of Education was A. F. Lawrence. He held the post for five years. Then he was succeeded by H. Jacques until 1932, when the Department was closed because of the economic

52

R.W. Hammond, "Report on Education in Sarawak", Sarawak State Archives (typescript) 1937, p. 97.

53

Ibid.

54

Order No. XI, 1924, *SGG* June 1, 1924.

depression. Both directors were government administrative officers, not educationists. As an administrator by designation, he was responsible for other duties in his portfolio. His functions as director were simply part of his wider duties as an administrator. Thus he could not concentrate exclusively on his work in the education department. Hence apart from supervising registered schools in Sarawak, the Department could not do much. It did not create a single national school system. In fact when the Department reopened in 1939, it was made responsible only for Malay and Mission schools but not for Chinese schools. The three types of streams still maintained their own school system. Consequently these different systems, lacking professional guidance and control from the central government, gradually developed in their own way. Eventually the lack of coordination created a wide disparity between different types of schools and great inequality between the opportunities for education available to the people of Sarawak. The disparity occurred not only in the language used and subjects taught, but also in job opportunities available to pupils and the general value of the schools.

Under Brooke rule Malay vernacular schools were considered as government sponsored schools. Mission schools received grants-in-aid from the government. (see Table 5) The education expenditure percentage was very small. It ranged from 0.8 per cent in 1900 to 2.3 per cent in 1938. The total rate of increase was scarcely one per cent, from 1.4 per cent in 1876 to 2.3 per cent in 1938. Although Malay vernacular schools were regarded as government sponsored schools in Sarawak, the annual cost to government for each pupil in the Malay schools in 1935 (\$16.00) was slightly lower than the annual cost for each pupil in English (Mission) schools (\$18.50) (see Table 6).

TABLE 5. The Education expenditure by the Government in selected years from 1876 to 1938.

Year	Education	Total Expenditure	Expenditure Percentage
1876	\$ 1,864	\$ 130,000	1.4
1900	\$ 7,176	\$ 901,172	0.8
1917	\$ 22,927	\$1,359,746	1.6
1926	\$ 83,384	\$4,650,606	1.9
1938	\$100,117	\$4,272,140	2.3

Sources: "Annual Report of the Treasury", SG May, 1877, SG May, 1901, *Sarawak Government Gazette (SGG)* May, 1918, SGG May 1926, and *Sarawak Administration Report 1938*, Kuching, 1939, p. 1 and 25.

TABLE 6. Annual Cost to Government for each pupil 1935.

	F.M.S.	S.S.	Sarawak
Malay Schools	\$23.00	\$19.00	\$16.00
Chinese Schools	7.41	6.81	3.19
English Medium (Mission) Schools, Government aided	34.66	46.99	18.5 (4 Kuching Mission Schools)

Sources: R.W. Hammond, "Report on Education in Sarawak", typescript, 1937, Appendix 21.

In general, with this background of a small percentage of revenue being devoted to educational expenditure in Sarawak, it was not surprising that the literacy rate among the natives in Sarawak was low. According to the 1947 census on literacy in Sarawak the total number of Malays and Melanau who could read and write was about four per cent, and in other natives it was about two per cent (see Table 7).

TABLE 7. The total number of literacy in Sarawak, 1947.

Cultural Group	Literate	Illiterate	Percentage of Illiteracy
Malay	12,510	70,662	85
Malanau	2,594	28,983	91
Sea Dayaks	3,625	161,574	98
Land Dayaks	2,480	33,095	93
Other natives	569	24,124	98
Chinese	42,280	81,115	66
Indigenous Asiatic	1,284	3,152	72
Total	65,306	402,705	86

Sources: E.R. Leach, *An Economic Survey of Colonial Territories, Federation of Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong, Brunei, North Borneo and Sarawak*, HMSO, London, Vol. V, 1955, p. 132.

TEACHERS

As the Malay vernacular schools began to expand at the end of the 1920s the teacher training recruitment employed by the government became inadequate. Before Maderasah Melayu was set up the Malay school teachers were recruited from Malay language scholars like Encik Bakar and Encik Sawal. When Kampong Jawa and Kampong Gersik schools were opened, most of the teachers were recruited

from graduates of these schools. But after some time it was found that the system could never improve the standards and methods of teaching because it was based on purely internal recruitment and training. In fact it led gradually to a decline in teaching and educational standards because without proper additional training those teachers had only limited literacy and teaching skill. Therefore a decision was made in 1929 to establish a teacher training college in Sarawak. The idea was mentioned when the government announced a plan to merge Kampong Jawa School and the Government Lay School Malay section. It stated, "... to start with a large proportion of the graduates from Maderasah Melayu will be trained as teachers which the various Malay schools throughout the State so urgently require."⁵⁶ Since the highest academic qualification for entry was a pass in standard six, it was necessary for those selected to attend Teachers Trainee Classes for three years (normally they did part-time teaching and received week-end training). Then they would sit for the Teacher Training Examination in the third year. At about the same time the government had agreed as a start to send three trainee students from Sarawak to be trained as Malay school teachers at Sultan Idris Training College, Malaya. The students were Abang Hamdin bin Abang Hj. Abdul Kadir, Abang Anuar bin Abang Almarhum Abang Uni and Abang Saupi bin Abang Hj. Abd. Gapor. They were sponsored by the Sarawak Government.⁵⁷ Since the cost of training at SITC was high, the government could not afford to send more students. The second batch, sent in 1935, consisted of two students. They were Yusof bin Hj. Johari and Mohamad bin Bujang. The third batch comprised three students and was sent in 1938. One of them was Osman bin Zainudin.⁵⁸ It was hoped that these potential Malay school teachers could spread the knowledge gained at SITC to Sarawak students. In Winstedt's words they were supposed, "to go out to the village schools (Malay schools) to influence the physical, mental, moral and economic welfare of the coming generation."⁵⁹ Since only eight students had the opportunity to study at SITC, most of the Malay school teachers were trained in Sarawak, particularly at Maderasah Melayu until the

56

SG March 2, 1931.

57

SG March 1, 1930.

58

Interviewed in Sarawak (Kuching) in November, 1973.

59

Report on Education FMS, 1929, p. 7.

government established Sarawak Teacher Training College in 1940.⁶⁰ However, before the latter building was constructed the training was done at the Maderasah.

Hammond in his "Education Report" had suggested that the syllabus of the Sarawak Teacher Training College should be based on standard six and seven academic work but adjusted to the shorter timetable with probably fewer class hours. According to Hammond the academic work should be consist of Malay language, English language, general knowledge, history, geography, hygiene, agriculture, arithmetic, drawing, singing and physical instruction. For professional training he listed the theory and method of teaching, school organization, community work and practical teaching. For general purposes, the subjects to be taught were practical agriculture, practical handicraft (for instance basketwork, net making and carving). This syllabus would be a two-year-course. But if the course could be extended to a third year, most of the latter year should be spent in taking special Medical Department and Agricultural Department courses. More time would then be available in the first and second years for academic and professional study. The language of instruction would be Malay.⁶¹

When the Teacher Training College was finally set up in 1940 its curriculum consisted of a basic academic course and a practical course as suggested by Hammond, with a teaching praticum. The college teaching was in Malay. The first intake to the college consisted of 30 students. The principal was seconded from Malaya. He was Mohd. Said Hussain.⁶² The duration of training was two years.

On the whole the curriculum was more or less the same as the curriculum taught in SITC. Moreover the principal himself was a SITC graduate. The textbooks used are normally acquired by the College either from the Malay Translation Bureau in Malaya or from Indonesia. This had very important effects on the students since by reading those books, particularly books and magazines from Indonesia literature, culture and nationalism. The effect could be seen in later developments, especially during the anti-cession movement of 1946-1951, in relation to which the first British governor in his speech at the Sarawak Council Negeri commented,

60
SG May 1, 1941.

61
Hammond, "Education" Appendix V. See also Appendix XX.

62
Further information is not available.

Anti-cession feeling has been particularly strong among Malay school teachers, most of whom have been recruited and trained in Kuching. This led to the mass resignation of 87 out of 152 Malay teachers in April 1947 and the closure of 22 out of 62 Government Malay Schools.⁶³

THE ATTITUDE OF THE MALAY-MUSLIMS TOWARDS EDUCATION

In the early period, most Malay parents were either reluctant or indifferent about sending their children to Malay vernacular schools. Generally they viewed secular education as offering nothing compared to their traditional education which provided the learning of the Quran and could satisfy their spiritual, social and material needs. The prospects of making their children 'better farmers' and 'better fisherman', as the Malay school system was intended to do, made little impression on them since it was considered a waste of time. But as time passed there was a growing tendency to accept the secular school. This was due partly to the active support given by the Datus and native officers, which made Malay schools popular, and partly to the growing attraction of the government jobs, particularly clerkships, available with the expansion of the old departments and the creation of the new departments in the late 1920s. Moreover, entry into the government service provided an important vehicle of upward mobility not only economically but also socially. Those groups who normally filled the clerkships in the government bureaucracy were popularly known as 'orang kerani'⁶⁴ came from the Malay schools, particularly GLS, Kampong Jawa School and Kampong Gersik School (126 out of the total of 166).

Due to the expansion of European bureaucracy and as the economic situation in the country became more complex, the usage of English in the administration became increasingly important; despite Vyner Brooke's policy of putting more emphasis on the Malay character of his administration. As a result of the expansion of European bureaucracy, English became more important and most of the jobs in public and private sectors required English. Moreover, the curriculum offered at the mission schools was particularly suited for the production of clerks and bureaucrats; and towards the end of Brooke rule the schools began offering commercial subjects like typing, short-hand and book-keeping to

63

SG January 2, 1948.

64

Abang Yusof Puteh, *Some Aspects of the Marriage Customs Among the Sarawak Malay*. DBP, Kuala Lumpur, 1966, p. 15.

suit the demand of the new employment opportunities in business firms or companies. This was not done in Malay schools as Malay education was geared towards a 'rural bias'.

In general the standard of education in Malay schools was low. The knowledge obtained in the highest standard was not enough for a Malay student to get a job other than as a messenger or farmer where English was not necessary. There were of course exceptions for a limited number of students who had a chance to study at Maderasah Melayu, particularly in the special English class. The practical subjects offered in the Malay school curriculum were too elementary compared with the mission school curriculum. As the government intended, the curriculum seemed to be fit only for 'tillers of the soil'.

The standard of education in Malay schools was low due to various reasons. These included lack of facilities; shortage of textbooks; which in many schools were sufficient for only a quarter of the class; shortage of general reading material and very few library books. Many villages were still without schools.⁶⁵ To solve the problem of serious deficiencies in both quantity and variety, Hammond had suggested that a wider choice was necessary. He believed that about 150 books in romanised Malay used in the Dutch East Indies should be taken into consideration and commented that though the Batavian Government still found those books had to be revised and modernised, he felt that they were better than those supplied by the Malay Translation Bureau.⁶⁶

Although the value and the standard of Malay education were low, in the 1930s the number of Malay schools and the number of students had increased. In addition to the increased number of students in the Malay schools, the number of students who attended mission schools also began to increase (even though Malays were not encouraged to go to mission schools). Although the majority of the Malay parents sent their children to Malay schools, some of them were not against sending their sons and daughters to the English schools. This meant that the English language was also essential in the state schools of Sarawak. Malay children who wished to become clerks, officers, court-writers, teachers, interpreters, surveyors, translators, inspectors, dressers and dispensers needed to learn English.⁶⁷ The particular group who realized that

65

C.D. Le Gros Clark, *Blue Report*, Kuching, 1935.

66

Hammond, "Education", pp. 100.

67

Letter to SG on 'Education for Natives' by Nahar Effendi in SG, June 1, 1931.

mission (English) education provided a major employment opportunity came from elite families in Kuching. By 1935 there were about 241 Malay students attending mission schools.⁶⁸

In conclusion it could be said that Malay education was not neglected as compared to Dayak education, though it was to a certain degree limited and 'backward'.⁶⁹ The Second Rajah in making policy had stressed that he did not aim at a very high standard of teaching in the schools.⁷⁰ Nevertheless, towards the end of his rule, he himself encouraged the development of mission schools and the implementation of western values by praising western values such as individual responsibility, industry and liberty.⁷¹ Apart from that, with the new trend of development, in which English became an important medium of instruction in government administration, there was a growing demand for English school graduates in private firms like the Borneo Company Limited and Steamship Company. Malay school graduates stood a slim chance of being employed in the public and private sectors. In other words it could be said, that there were less economic opportunities available for Malay school graduates than for mission school graduates. The result could obviously be seen in the middle level of government bureaucracy and in the private sector. The majority of the Malays who were in the government service were Malay school teachers, while the rest were in the lower strata which did not require English education. A small number of Malays who filled in the middle strata were either mission school graduates, or those who had been in the service when Malay language was still considered as one of the administrative languages in the early period of twentieth century, or they were Maderasah Melayu graduates.

68

Hammond, "Education", Appendix III.

69

Ibid.

70

SG July 1, 1910.

71

J.M. Seymour, "Education in Sarawak under Brooke Rule 1841-1941", M.A. thesis, University of Hawaii, Honolulu, 1967, pp. 40.