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Tamil Schools in the Federated Malay States under British Colonial Rule 1895-1941

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Abstract

In the time of British rule of the Federated Malay States (FMS) from 1895 to 1941, many Indians, especially the Tamils from South India, were brought in as labourers. Long-term Tamil primary schools were established to cater to their children's educational needs. This article presents a historical investigation of the development, challenges, and disparity faced by Tamil primary schools in the FMS between 1895-1941. The study employs thematic content analysis to study the primary and secondary historical sources. The findings report that four themes surrounding challenges and disparity emerged among Tamil schools in the FMS, namely building and equipment; subjects and syllabi; schoolteachers; and teacher training. The study underscores the development of Tamil schools in the FMS, the significant issues faced by the schools under British colonial rule, and the implications for children of Tamil migrants. Significantly, this study contributes new knowledge towards the history of education during British colonialism, emphasising the crucial role of Tamil schools in preserving language and culture and potentially shaping future research in this area.

Keywords

Federated Malay States, British colonialism, Tamil primary schools

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Escuelas Tamiles en los Estados Federados Malayos Bajo el Dominio Colonial Británico 1895-1941

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Resumen

En la época del dominio británico de los Estados Malayos Federados (EMF), de 1895 a 1941, muchos indios, especialmente los tamiles del sur de la India fueron traídos como mano de obra. Se crearon escuelas primarias tamiles de larga duración para atender las necesidades educativas de sus hijos e hijas. Este artículo presenta una investigación histórica del desarrollo, los retos y la disparidad a la que se enfrentaron las escuelas primarias tamiles en los EMF entre 1895-1941. El estudio emplea el análisis de contenido temático para estudiar las fuentes históricas primarias y secundarias. Las conclusiones indican que surgieron cuatro temas en torno a los retos y la disparidad entre las escuelas tamiles de los EMF a saber, el edificio y el equipamiento, las asignaturas y los planes de estudio, los maestros/as y la formación del profesorado. El estudio destaca el desarrollo de las escuelas tamiles en los EMF, los importantes problemas a los que se enfrentaron las escuelas bajo el dominio colonial británico y las implicaciones para los hijos e hijas de las personas emigrantes tamiles. Este estudio aportó nuevos conocimientos a la historia de la educación durante el colonialismo británico, haciendo hincapié en el papel crucial de las escuelas tamiles en la preservación de la lengua y la cultura, y contribuyendo a futuras investigaciones en este ámbito.

Palabras clave

Estados federados malayos, colonialismo británico, escuelas primarias tamiles

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Federated Malay States (FMS) was formally established by the British in 1895, and it included Perak, Selangor, Pahang, and Negeri Sembilan, four states in contemporary Malaysia. The FMS technically ended in 1942, when the Japanese forces took over Malaya from the British in the Second World War (Mills, 1966; Wah, 1971). After the establishment of FMS, the number of Indian migrants multiplied, especially the Tamil ethnic group from South India, who were brought in as labourers (Gilman, 1923). They spoke the Tamil language, and most Tamils belonged to the Hindu religion. Even though the British brought in other ethnic groups from India, the Tamils comprised the most significant number. Before the start of the Second World War, almost 85% of the Indian migrants in FMS were Tamils. The majority were rubber estate working-class labourers, forming 70-80 per cent of the FMS rubber estate labour force (Subramaniam & Muniandy, 2006; Sandhu, 1969; Kaur, 2014). While it has been recorded that in the FMS, most of the rubber estates (85%) were owned by Europeans, the rest were owned by Chinese landowners, and there were no large-scale Indian or Malay-owned rubber estates (Khalid, 2014). There was also a tiny Tamil working class in Railways, Municipalities, Town and Sanitary Boards, and Public Works Departments (Kaur, 2014; Sandhu, 1969; Willford, 2014). However, a critical fact was the presence of four other small Tamil-speaking groups, which differed significantly from most working-class Tamil migrants in FMS. The groups included Sri Lankan Tamils, Tamil Chettiars (Business class Tamil community), Tamil Muslims, and the Tamil Christian community (Arasaratnam, 1970; Murthy, 1932; Schiffman, 2002; Subramaniam & Muniandy, 2006). The growth of the Tamil population in FMS also brought in the Tamil language and culture. Education provided an essential avenue to maintain the Tamil language and culture, a demand primarily fulfilled through the unique establishment of Tamil schools in FMS (Arasaratnam, 1970; Manickam, 2009).

Another constituent to consider for establishing Tamil schools is the practice of *laissez-faire* policy, which was applied to education by the colonial government (Raman & Sua, 2010). There was no “clear-cut” policy for education before the Second World War, so emphasis was placed on separating the Malay, Chinese and Indian communities (Tan & Darit, 2015, p.5). Whilst it is essential to acknowledge the existence of English language schools that catered for the Malay aristocrat, the Eurasian population, and some affluent urban Chinese and Indian families, these schools were created for the benefit of the British colonial administration (Kandasamy & Raman, 1998; Wah, 1980; Kim, 1974). These factors promoted a segregated vernacular education school system. In turn, each community had its school with a different medium of instruction, which also led to the establishment of Malay, Chinese and Tamil vernacular schools (Hashim, 2004; Watson, 1993).

Much research has been conducted on the history of the Indian population in Malaysia, especially the Tamil working class (Ampalavanar, 1981; Arasaratnam, 1970; Mahajani, 1960; Sandhu, 1969). While these sources concentrate on significant events in Malaysian Indian history, they only discuss Tamil schools when required. A comprehensive historical analysis, especially in the context of FMS, does not exist. Even though Dass (1972) concerns Tamil education more specifically in his work, it does not cover the plantation Tamil population children’s education, investigate the problems and disparity among the Tamil schools, or provide an in-depth analysis of Tamil school teachers and their training. Alatas (1977, p.227) stated that there is a need to acknowledge memory and study the Malayan Indians at the time

of British colonisation, especially the South Indian Tamil labourers, who were “exploited, abused, and poorly managed” by their employers, as well as the British government for their colonial capital benefits. While in the international scholarship on the history of Indian labour and migration during the British Empire, very few works investigate the education of the labour's children and their schooling. From the global history perspective, Conrad (2016) argued that immigrant history at the time of colonisation needs fresh investigation because, in the past, much historical work on migrant communities was written according to the narratives set by the Western perspective of imperialism. Because of this, Conrad (2016) advocates for a fresh, critical examination of history during colonisation. This paper aims to present a historical study of the development, problems, and disparities faced by Tamil schools in FMS from 1895 to 1941. This will be a new contribution to the scholarship of Malaysian Tamil school history and more comprehensive education history in the time of the British Empire.

Research Methodology

This study is primarily based on primary and secondary sources. The primary archival sources include reports, policy documents, minutes and official government correspondence letters related to Tamil education in FMS, which were searched from the National Archived of Malaysia in Kuala Lumpur. The National Library of Singapore newspaper articles provided valuable information on Tamil education in FMS. The secondary sources helped document the bigger picture of the Tamil population migration to FMS, broader British colonial education policies and practices in FMS, and various other issues being investigated related to the Indian population in FMS. Most of these secondary sources included books, journal articles, unpublished thesis and chapters in books gleaned from the University of Malaya Library, Malaysia and the University of New England Library, Australia.

The data selection criteria for primary and secondary sources are based on the aims of this research. In total, 16 primary sources from the archive, six newspaper articles, and 44 secondary sources were identified to achieve the research aim. The keywords used for the search are Federated Malay States education, Tamil schools, Tamil labourers, and teacher education in Federated Malay States. The year of the search is between 1885 and 1941. Intentionally, the researchers decided to search ten years earlier, before the establishment of FMS in 1895, to identify if there were any Tamil schools already established in these states. The data were analysed by employing a thematic content analysis approach. This method helps the researchers identify the patterns that emerge within the data.

Tamil Schools in the Federated Malay States

Tamil education in the FMS only existed in primary education; hence, there were no Tamil secondary schools in the FMS. Tamil schools can be separated into two types: government schools and non-government schools. Within this structure were three types of non-government schools: mission schools, committee schools and estate schools (Holgate, 1949), which were

subsequently categorised as aided Tamil Schools or non-aided Tamil schools. Whilst government schools, otherwise known as ‘funded Tamil schools’, were funded by the FMS government, the aided Tamil schools received small government grants-in-aid to support their financial needs annually. These minimal grants were accompanied by specific criteria: size of the school, attendance and retention rates, academic achievement, facility availability and maintenance, qualifications held by teachers, quality of teaching and teaching resources. The visiting inspectors collected this information and provided recommendations for the Education Department. This recommendation subsequently dictated the funding allocated to each school (Firmstone, 1917; Grants et al., 1924; Holgate, 1949; Inspector et al., 1919). On the other hand, non-aided Tamil schools did not receive government funding. While most of these schools were in estates, it is known that some schools that had previously received grants would eventually withdraw from the government-aided program. This was due to the school not fulfilling the set criteria for funding or the school management committee making the executive decision not to apply for government funding (Holgate, 1949).

Initially, the British Government had no intention of establishing Government Tamil schools, and they did not believe it was their responsibility to provide education for Tamil migrant children. Even though there was demand, especially with the growing Tamil population in FMS, the government refused to commit to any level of support or development (Selangor Secretariat, 1886). The Resident-General of the FMS statement has been quoted in Maraiasoosay (1996) as saying:

It is not a proper policy for the Government to undertake the education of the children of the alien temporary population in their language. On the other hand, all Government and State-aided [English] schools are open to children of all nationalities (p.9).

However, when the demand for Tamil schools increased significantly among the government-employed Tamils, the government finally stepped in (Selangor Secretariat, 1892). By 1900, two Tamil government schools were established, one in Negri Sembilan and another in Perak (Arasaratnam, 1970; Dass, 1972). Two government Tamil schools followed this in Selangor (Collinge., 1905). In the beginning, a few of these government schools were temporarily located in rental buildings before being moved to newly established government school buildings (Director et al., 1916) Over the years, the number of Government Tamil schools increased, and by 1938, there were 13 schools, eight in Perak, four in Selangor and one in Negri Sembilan, and all the schools offered education up to year six (Hendershot, 1941).

During the early years of the FMS, Christian missionaries and their reverends were instrumental in developing Tamil schools. Amongst them was Reverend Samuel Thambo Abraham of the Methodist Church from Jaffna, Sri Lanka, who, in 1896, assisted in setting up the Tamil Church and opening the Anglo-Tamil School in Kuala Lumpur the following year (Celliah, 1940; Hodelin-ter Wal, 2019). By 1900, financial support had been initiated by the churches and the broader Tamil Christian population to assist missionaries in creating Tamil schools. The FMS government provided help generally in the form of land allocation (Arasaratnam, 1970). This led to the development of three Anglo-Tamil schools in Perak and one in Selangor, all under the Bishop of the Methodist Church. In the same year, a Saint Theresa’s Convent Tamil School was established in Taiping, Perak, by Sister Euphrase of the

local Catholic Church (Saint et al., 2024). Two prominent schools were later founded by the Sisters of the Holy Infant Jesus, “Les Dames de Saint-Maur,” fourteen years apart, which solidified the noticeable outreach being undertaken by Christian missionaries in FMS. These were the Saint Joseph Convent Tamil School in Sentul, Kuala Lumpur, built in 1924, and the Saint Philomena Convent in Ipoh, Perak, established in 1938 (Federation et al., 2022).

In addition to Christian missionary schools, Hindu organisations like the Ramakrishna Mission and Appar Seva Sangam established schools in FMS. In 1914, the Ramakrishna Mission, a Hindu religious-based mission, established the Vivekananda Tamil School in Brickfields, Kuala Lumpur. (Selangor Secretariat, 1923; The Vivekananda Ashrama et al., 2024). Around the same time, the Appar Seva Sangam, a Hindu religious organisation led by Swami Atmaram, a disciple of the Saivite Saint Appar, established the Appar Tamil School in Kuala Lumpur (Raja, 2012). Overall, by 1938, there were 23 Missions Schools around FMS, and most mission schools were recipients of government grants-in-aid (Ministry of Education, 1967), except a few mission schools, which are private non-aided for example, the St Mary’s Catholic Tamil School in Kuala Lumpur (Inspector et al., 1933).

The term Committee school referred to Tamil schools established and run by a managing committee, which involved residents who ran the school by collecting subscriptions to operate the school (Holgate, 1948). Initially, the Tamil Committee schools were started wherever the Tamil population was concentrated in major towns. The Tamil labourers in FMS towns preferred sending their children to this type of school because they could not afford the fees of English schools. This school only operated for a few hours without enforcing official attendance. This enabled children to study and work part-time while their parents worked. The Thamboosamy Pillai Tamil School in Kuala Lumpur, established in 1906 by a private individual, Rajasooria (Raman & Raja, 2019), is considered one of FMS's earliest Tamil committee schools. This was followed by the Saraswathi Tamil School in Scott Road, Kuala Lumpur, established by the Ceylon (Sri Lankan) Tamil Association (Inspector of School Selangor, 1933). The financially affluent Tamil Chettiars community managed a committee school by their own Thiruvalluvar Elavasa Tamizh Kalasaalai [Thiruvalluvar Free Tamil School], in Perak (Datta, 2010 – 2011). While other Committee Tamil schools were established, most did not last long and were forced to close only a few years after opening due to financial difficulties and low enrolment (Firmstone, 1918; Hendershot, 1941). When the government introduced the grants-in-aid scheme, most committee schools started reorganising their governance and preparing their schools to qualify for financial support (Holgate, 1948).

The estate schools represented the opposite of most Tamil schools in FMS, as they were in a rural area deep in the plantations (Holgate, 1948). Evidence from the Selangor Secretariat (1886) shows that estate schools existed before FMS was established. An example was the Luiseum Estate Tamil School in Sungei Ujong, Selangor, which was already in operation by 1893. In the beginning, many schools used temporary establishments or infrastructure to provide classes, which meant some schools were built from the estate’s Hindu Temples, whilst others converted abandoned or unused buildings (Arasarathnam, 1970). In some cases, Estate schools were established in the same building where the parents worked (Arasarathnam, 1970). Despite these variations in structure and organisation, most schools were not up to the mark to be called a school, nor were they correctly managed. Contributing to this situation was the

minimal financial support provided by the plantation management and government and the lack of parental involvement. This was seen in a letter from the Manager of the Linggi and Linsum Estates, based in Rantau town (Negeri Sembilan), who expressed in detail to the FMS education department the enormous difficulties encountered in encouraging students to attend the local estate school (Selangor Secretariat, 1909). The driving force behind this lack of participation was parental expectations – usually a lack of ambition for their children’s education and the desire to enter the workforce as early as possible. This occurred with children as young as eight (Holgate, 1949; Krishnan et al., 2014). Another essential factor for Tamil estate schools in FMS is that until 1912, there was no ordinance to make estate owners provide education for their labourer’s children (Arasaratnam, 1970).

The eventual growth of estate Tamil schools can be seen to stem from the implementation of employment laws and regulations imposed by the FMS government. Unsurprisingly, the enacted 1912 and 1923 Labour Ordinances immediately generated vocal, solid opposition from the plantation owners. Their lack of commitment and adversarial behaviour was encapsulated in a statement in 1923 by the plantation owners’ representative who stated: “So long as they let the Controller of Labour pass my smoke factory with the word “school” written up in large letters, I shall be quite happy” (Arasaratnam, 1970, p.179). As part of these new regulations, the Labour Ordinances stipulated that each estate with ten or more children between the ages of 6 and 12 must have a nursery, school, and teaching staff. The Labour Ordinances also required that the plantation owners pay the teachers’ salaries and provide the necessary facilities and land for the school establishment within the estate. Another exciting development was that the Labour Ordinances recommended the appointment of a European officer to supervise and look after the Tamil schools’ affairs. Subsequently, in 1930, a European officer was appointed from Britain, but his term was concise, and it took until 1938 for the next European officer to be assigned (Kee & Hean, 1972). The introduction of the Regulations for Tamil Schools in 1928 provided some form of protection, management structure, and supervision. They indicated the plantation owner’s commitment towards their labour’s children’s education (Winstedt, 1928). The introduction of this Labour Code saw the number of Tamil primary schools increase throughout the FMS, especially in Selangor, Perak and Negeri Sembilan (Belle, 2015; Holgate, 1949; Kee & Hean, 1972). Even Pahang, with few Tamil migrants, recorded seven Tamil estate schools (Tamil et al., 1929). Whilst a few estate schools educated students in years five and six, most schools only offered education up to the fourth year. Even then, the number of students who completed a fourth year of schooling was small (Holgate, 1949). Unfortunately, we could not identify the accurate number of Tamil estate schools in government documents in FMS, as many non-aid Tamil schools failed to register with the government education department.

Challenges and Disparity Undermining the Tamil Schools in FMS

Four themes emerged from the primary and secondary data from the thematic content analysis as the most challenging factors that affected Tamil schools in FMS. These themes included buildings and equipment, subjects and syllabi, schoolteachers, and teacher training. Underscoring these themes is the noticeable disparity between the types of schools. This has

provided a foundation for juxtaposing these findings with other types of vernacular schools in the FMS. The remainder of the paper discusses the different kinds of Tamil schools together under headings that reflect the themes.

Buildings and Equipment

What set most Tamil schools apart from the other schools was the availability and subsequent construction of buildings. This included classrooms, teachers' offices, libraries, canteens, health clinics, sanitary facilities, sporting facilities, vegetable gardens, woodwork workshops for boys, and needlework rooms for girls (Ampalavanar, 1981; Arasaratnam, 1970; Dass, 1972; Manickam, 2009). This was in addition to equipment and resources such as blackboards, tables, chairs, cupboards, and desks (Winstedt, 1928).

Whilst there were few government Tamil schools in FMS, those that did exist often possessed better infrastructure than the other Tamil schools. Most government schools had one or two wooden single-story buildings, four or five classrooms, an office for teachers and the headmaster, and a canteen. Government funding maintained these buildings (UNESCO, 1948). As time progressed and student enrolments increased, the visiting "Inspector of Schools" recommended that these schools receive further support to establish extra facilities. These included sports fields, workshops, and needlework rooms, which soon became the 'norm' in most government schools (Firmstone, 1918, pp. 1 -26). Nevertheless, there were exceptions, and this support required government approval. In 1907, the Tamil residents of Klang in the state of Selangor sent a petition to the Secretary of the British Resident of Selangor in Kuala Lumpur, requesting a new site for the current Government Tamil School. According to the petition, the current school was a hired building in the town's centre, surrounded by workshops and brothel houses (Klang et al., 1907). Despite the constant noise and disruptions to learning, the government's response was very dawdling, and when they did respond, they showed very little interest in rectifying the situation. Finally, of their own volition, the Klang Tamil community, with financial support from two prominent individuals in the Tamil Chettiar community, purchased a piece of government land to build a new school (Selangor Secretariat, 1910).

As most Tamil Christian missionary schools were strategically located on the same site as English missionary schools, they could share some facilities, such as the canteen, sports field, and health clinic. This sometimes led to collaborative sporting events and school functions (Ampalavanar, 1981). Also, with the support of the Church and the Christian community, most schools could construct new buildings and facilities needed and maintain them without many issues. Hindu missionary schools like the Vivekananda Tamil School and Appar Tamil School retained average building standards and the equipment required to run daily operations. This is doable with the government grants-in-aid program, followed by the financial support gained through their Hindu missionary and community support (Ampalavanar, 1981).

More significant educational developments dictated the committee schools' infrastructure growth – mainly government policy, increasing enrolments and external financial support. For instance, committee schools were run in shophouses, rental properties, or other makeshift buildings during the late nineteenth century. Once enrolments increased, school committees

could secure the government's grants-in-aid to construct more permanent buildings with the necessary infrastructure and equipment (Ampalavanar, 1981; Kee & Hean, 1972).

By contrast, most estate schools have yet to receive external funding for building and equipment. As mentioned above, the responsibility fell to the plantation owners to provide the necessary resources. These individuals were also tasked with allocating separate funding and land to design and construct the school buildings. All of these were considered a low priority for the plantation owners (Dass, 1972). This situation began to change with the introduction of the consecutive Labour Ordinances. These policies, however, did not always equate to an improvement in building infrastructure and often depended upon plantation owners' own beliefs and financial position. The 1928 Regulation was challenging to manage, especially for the estate schools, as the policies recommended that each school have a separate building, with the floor made from wood or concrete and floor spacing totalling 12 square feet for each student (Winstedt, 1928). This is in addition to stipulating that the height of the classrooms should not be less than 12 feet, with each school having satisfactory lighting. Each classroom should then accommodate a clock, blackboard, a table and a chair for the teacher, and desks and benches for the students (Winstedt, 1928). When this regulation was released, concerns were raised to the F.M.S government that, besides government schools, all different types of schools would need help to fulfil the building and equipment requirements stipulated in the regulation. More concerning was that the Estate schools, which relied on the mercy of the plantation owners, may need help to fulfil these requirements (Jomaron, 1928). Confirming a total disregard by some plantation owners and the unsatisfactory conditions, Dr Sundram, an academic in his anthropological study on Tamil labours in FMS, concluded, "Without exaggeration, I would like to state emphatically that today the Tamil children on the estates, taken as a whole are practically unprovided for as regards primary education" (Sundram, 1933, p.13). Unlike government, missionary and committee schools, the facilities at estate schools remained below the usual standard, even after being bestowed with financial support and implementing government ordinances (Sundram, 1933).

By contrast, the government's approach to allocating land and funding to English schools was different and appeared far more generous than what was assigned to any Tamil schools. Most English schools, either government or Christian missionary schools, were built on prime land in the major cities and towns, and the buildings were concrete blocks in a very British colonial-style architrave. Most government English or Christian English missionary schools had their primary and secondary schools in the exact location. As a result, most primary schools could share the same facilities available (Kee & Hean, 1972). The government built most of the Malay vernacular primary schools free of cost. Some schools also had living quarters for staff and other necessary facilities and equipment provided through annual grant-in-aid requirements (Kee & Hean, 1972). On the other hand, the Chinese schools received some government grant-in-aid, like the Tamil schools. From the onset of the FMS, members of the sizeable Chinese population were involved in various successful business adventures, which subsequently provided the means for many businesses to support Chinese schools privately (Khalid, 2014; Shanmugavelu et al., 2020; Sua, 2019).

Subjects and Syllabus

When Tamil schools in FMS first started, no specific regulations regarding subjects and syllabi existed. In most situations, the individual school's management, or teachers, decided what subjects and syllabus were to be taught (Arasaratnam, 1970). It can be argued that after the 1928 regulation, only Tamil schools in FMS had proper standardised subjects and syllabi. Subjects included in the 1928 regulation were Tamil language, Arithmetic, Geography, General Knowledge, Drawing and Handwork, Physical Training and Voice Training. The regulation consists of syllabus details from years one to five. However, the syllabus details were not very comprehensive; for example, in subjects like Geography for year one, the syllabus details include: "Day and sun, Night and Moon, Stars" (Winstedt, 1928, See Appendix, p.3).

Despite these inclusions, no allocation was provided for teaching English in Tamil schools (Winstedt, 1928), which was the official working language of FMS (Sandhu, 1969). It was also the language of instruction for secondary schools in FMS (Kee & Hean, 1972). Hendershot (1941), in his work, critiqued the omission of English in the 1928 regulation. His report concluded that when Tamil children were not taught English at the primary level, it severely restricted students' ability to undertake secondary education, resulting in many of these students failing their first or second year and not continuing their studies. For children at the Estate schools, receiving an English language education was sometimes associated with leaving plantations to pursue higher education and better job opportunities. Pennycook (1989) argued that this association caused anxiety for the British administration and plantation owners. Thus, from the beginning, they made sure English as a language did not reach the estate children; by this, in any case, they prevented English from being included in the Tamil school curriculum. By controlling the children from learning English, the government and the planters believe that the long-term children will replace their parents as future estate labourers (Pennycook, 1989).

Despite the situation at other schools, it is acknowledged that Vivekananda Tamil School under the Ramakrishna Mission included English in their curriculum (Arasaratnam, 1970). However, this offering was within the purview of the school and often reflected local contexts, including the availability of teachers who could teach English. Overall, the students' performance was on par with that of English school students (Ramakrishna Mission, 1941). It can be argued that due to the location of Vivekananda Tamil School in Brickfields, Kuala Lumpur, a part of FMS known as "Little Jaffna". Jaffna is a Tamil-majority town in northern Sri Lanka (Ramasamy, 1988, p. 80), and most students who attended the school were Sri Lankan Tamils. Most Sri Lankan Tamils had a good command of English due to their educational background from Jaffna, which was under Christian missionaries. Also, most Sri Lankan Tamils held an English-speaking government or private occupation in FMS. This led to their preference for their children to learn Tamil and English (Arasaratnam, 1970, 1978; Ramasamy, 1988). This inclination extended to Vivekananda Tamil School, which ended up providing English language classes for students enrolled in year three (Arasaratnam, 1970).

As no time had been allocated to English language classes in the curriculum for Malay vernacular schools, their situation was somewhat like their Tamil counterparts. This largely stemmed from the British government's failure to provide most Malay children with English

language education (Pennycook, 1998; Watson, 1993). The British attitude towards providing English education to the Malays has always been negative. This can be noticed, for example, in the statement below by Frank Swettenham, a Resident of Perak in 1890, quoted in Soong (2019, p.20):

English could not be well-taught except in very few schools. I do not think it is advisable to attempt to give the children of an agricultural population an indifferent knowledge of a language that to all but the very few would only unfit them for the duties of life and make them discontented with anything like manual labour... (Vernacular education), the Koran, and something about figures and geography, this knowledge and the habits of industry, punctuality, and obedience that they will gain by regular attendance at school will be a material advantage to them....

In the context of Chinese schools, their curriculum does not include English either. However, this was not a concern for the Chinese community because their curriculum is very much focused on the Chinese outlook, and they were not interested in the English outlook of their curriculum. Also, the Chinese schools were very culturally Chinese-conscious, and their motive was to promote Chinese languages. The Chinese schools followed the curriculum and pattern set in China, with all their textbooks imported from the mainland (The Report et al., 1951).

Tamil School Teachers and Teacher Training

Initially, schools were set up in British Malaya, including the English missionary and English government schools. Most teachers were either from Britain, missionaries from Europe, or other parts of the British Empire (Chelliah, 1940). In the 1850s, English missionaries and local English government school students who did well in their primary or secondary school examinations were employed as pupil-teachers from various ethnic groups, but the Eurasian community contributed the most. Unfortunately, the government established no teacher training colleges for English-medium schoolteachers; only in 1928, when Raffles College, Singapore was established, it started supplying trained graduate teachers for English missionary and English government schools (Chelliah, 1940; Kee & Hong, 1975). Initially, teachers with good Islamic religious backgrounds were recruited for the Malay medium primary schools. In 1917, a proposal was put forward at the Conference of Residents to build a Malay teachers' college to train Malay medium school teachers. Five years later, the government established the Sultan Idris Training College in Tanjong Malim, Perak, to train local Malay male teachers (Adams & Lok, 2022; Kee & Hong, 1975). This was followed by a Malay women's teacher's college established in 1935 in Malacca (UNESCO, 1948). For the Chinese medium schools, the teachers were recruited from China (Kee & Hong, 1975). Even though only a few had teaching qualifications, the other Chinese teachers did not complete secondary education and lacked pedagogical training. No local teacher training centres were established in FMS to train local Chinese teachers; it was sometime after the Second World War that the government got serious about showing local Malayan-oriented Chinese teacher training facilities (The Report et al., 1951).

Employing suitably qualified teachers and teacher training facilities can arguably be considered the most noticeable discrepancies between Tamil schools and other types of schools in FMS. At its establishment, both government and committee schools employed male Tamil migrants as teachers. These individuals had voluntarily relocated to FMS for employment and, as a result, decided to take up minimum-pay teaching positions (Dass, 1972). It also meant that they often possessed a basic level of proficiency in Tamil literacy but had not undertaken formal teacher training. By 1918 onwards, most teachers employed at government and committee schools held a “Certificate of a Primary Trained Teacher (Madras)” or “Class 11 Certificate (Madras)” (Firmstone, 1918, p.2). However, as these teachers had only recently migrated to FMS, most possessed limited knowledge of British Malaya, its history, culture, or geopolitical situation, which meant they were more inclined to teach content about India (Ong, 1950).

In comparison, most teachers at Christian missionary Tamil schools either came under their missionary system or qualified teachers from South India or Sri Lanka (Cooke, 1966; Ramasamy, 1988; UNESCO, 1948). While similarities can be seen in the employment of teachers at the different types of Tamil primary schools discussed above, this, unsurprisingly, did not extend to estate schools. When schools were first established in estates, the teachers held other roles on the estate and were employed to teach part-time. This meant that these individuals were estate clerks, dispensers, kangani (Labour supervisors) and even estate labourers who understood Tamil literacy (Arasaratnam, 1970). Once the Labour Ordinance requirements and the Regulation for Tamil Schools requirements were released, more effort was made to recruit trained teachers from South India and Sri Lanka. However, most of the teachers in estate schools did not have the same qualifications or training required at other Tamil schools (Ramasamy, 1988). On the rare occasion that a qualified teacher worked at an estate school, they used this appointment as a stepping stone to secure a teaching position in a significant city that offered better pay and a higher standard of living (Arasaratnam, 1970). The quote below from Dr Sundram’s 1933 visit to estate schools shows that:

It is the head – kangani or krani (clerks) who looks after these estate children, if ever any schools are provided. But not being sufficiently trained in such subjects like child psychology, kindergarten, and other important methods of juvenile control, they are unable adequately to administer to the needs of our children in Malaya. Not being whole-time teachers, they are unwilling to waste their time upon a genuine approach to this question (Sundram, 1933, p.13).

The quote shows that many Tamil schools were without qualified teachers even after the labour code requirements. The historical evidence shows this has been an ongoing problem from the beginning. For example, in 1913, the Kapar District (Selangor) Planters Association secretary wrote to the Resident of Selangor requesting the government supply qualified teachers for Estate Tamil Schools. This is because most of the estate’s management in the Kapar district found it hard to recruit teachers with their initiative; they required the government to step in and help supply teachers. The reply of the Resident of Selangor’s office stated that the government could not provide teachers for the estate Tamil schools. Instead, the estate management should engage their teachers (Kapar et al., 1913). The example above shows

the difficulty in employing estate Tamil school teachers. This problem continued well into the 1920s, with most of the estate Tamil schools having a high turnover of teaching staff and low salaries, which meant schools, especially estate schools, were encountering exceptional difficulties with employing trained teachers (Wedgwood, 1929). As the twentieth century progressed, the situation worsened for Tamil vernacular schools. In 1937, less than a quarter of the 800 Tamil teachers in the FMS had received proper training or held appropriate teaching certificates (Arasaratnam, 1970). Perhaps for this reason, the government initiated a two-year training course for Tamil teachers the same year, which ran on a Saturday for six to seven hours. However, this initiative is only for teachers from Aided schools; teachers working in non-aided schools were not qualified for this program (Kee & Hean, 1972). Whilst not as formal as the institutions, seven centres were organised to ensure limited conflicts with Tamil schoolteachers' commitments during the week. These teachers studied the teaching methodology and pedagogy of “language, mathematics, geography, hygiene, general knowledge, physical training, gardening and handwork” (UNESCO, 1948; p. 18). This course lasted two years and was divided into three terms each year. The instructors were mostly Tamil teaching staff of English schools (UNESCO, 1948). By 1939, 200 teachers had graduated from the program (Saad & Haniffa, 2019). Despite this, issues related to teacher shortages, lack of qualifications and low salaries remained until after the Second World War (Cheeseman, 1946).

Conclusion

The historical study of Tamil schools in FMS from its humble beginning, in the early stage of FMS until the start of the Second World War, can be argued to be significant progress for a minority ethnic group whose majority was the labour class. Especially in the eyes of the British colonial administration, they are doing a great job. According to “Inspector of Indian Schools” Mr H.L Hodge, Tamil education in British Malaya is progressing well. Mr Hodge does appreciate the work done by the Ramakrishna Mission in their schools in FMS and Singapore, and he said they are doing a great job in girls' Tamil education progress as well (Ramakrishna Mission, 1941, p.16). However, his statement seems more related to the context of Tamil Government, Missionary and Committee schools. However, he does not mention anything about the progress of Tamil Estate schools in his speech. However, by contrast, the historical study above shows issues emerged related to Tamil schools in FMS in the aspects of infrastructure, subjects and syllabus and teacher training and recruitment were all related to the funding system for the vernacular schools the aided and non-aided and the overall commitment of the British government and the planters. This divides the schools into two categories: Estate Tamil schools and non-estate Tamil schools. The non-estate Tamil schools were far better in funding, facilities, teaching and learning quality than estate schools, which suffer poorly because of a lack of funding support and low-quality education and learning. The aspect of teacher training clearly shows the lack of government and the planter's commitment for a long time to consider providing good quality trained teachers for the Tamil school children, especially the locally trained teachers. Thandayutham stated that the British colonialists had no intention of educating the Tamil labourers to be wise and intelligent. The main aim of the British colonialists and the planters is to utilise the Tamil workforce to increase their production

and enrich themselves; they have very little interest in providing a quality education for the Tamil children (Thandayutham, 1981 in Manickam, 2009). It can be argued that the Tamil primary education in FMS in the time of the British administration was very much a survival of an ethnic minority group's culture, language, and identity in a foreign land, without much hope for their children to progress towards higher education and join the better workforce.

In global history, this study contributes to new knowledge about Indian migrant children's education during British colonisation, without any Western historical narrative of colonisation or imperialism. The study also opens the opportunity for further research into challenges and disparities among Indian schools during British colonisation, for example, in countries like South Africa, Fiji, Guyana, and Myanmar, where Indian migrants were brought as labour class. This will further enrich the history of education globally, as demonstrated in this study.

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