

REVISITING THE RAZAK REPORT 1956 AS A HISTORICAL EDUCATIONAL TEXT: A CRITICAL HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract

The growth and development of the Malaysian education system has been very colorful, in which it is full of interesting events and changes that strived towards the betterment of the people of Malaysia from the time of Western colonization up to now. Even though Malaysia has only been an independent nation for only about 56 years from the British Empire, the education system in Malaysia has been created, contorted, and revamped numerous times in accordance to the goals of the nation and the needs of the people of Malaysia. Within these numerous occasions of change of the Malaysian educational structure, the most prominent event is the development and implementation of the Report of the Education Committee 1956, or better known as the Razak Report 1956. Even until now the Razak Report 1956 continues to be the most important educational structure to be developed and implemented because it managed to provide a comprehensive educational structure for all three major ethnic groups in Malaysia (i.e., Malays, Chinese, and Indians). More importantly, even though the development and implementation of this educational plan was not without concerns and questions by these three ethnic groups, it managed to bring these three ethnic groups together in gaining independence from the British Empire and helped them develop a nation that they can call their home regardless of their social and cultural differences.

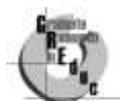
Introduction

The Report of the Education Committee 1956, or better known as the Razak Report 1956, was not the first educational structure developed in Malaysia. However, the Razak Report 1956 was the first education plan in Malaysia that was developed with the involvement of the people of Malaya, with representatives from all three major ethnic groups in Malaysia (e.g., Malays, Chinese and Indians). However, even though the Razak Report 1956 brought three major ethnic groups in Malaya together, provided the nation an identity, and gave them hope for a place that they could call home, it was not born without concerns and questions. Regardless of these concerns, the Razak Report 1956 remains as one of the most important educational text that has been developed in Malaysia—then and now. This is because the Razak Report 1956 managed to provide a well-structured and comprehensive education plan that catered to all of people of Malaya—especially in consideration of the three major ethnic groups in Malaya, i.e., Malays, Chinese, and Indians. More importantly, it also served as a jump start for Malaya as a nation independent of British colonization, and hence enabled Malaya to develop itself as a nation according to its own mold.

The Razak Report 1956 was developed with the merger of ideas from the Barnes Report 1951 (i.e., favored by the Malay ethnic group) and the Fenn Wu Report 1952 (i.e., favored by the Chinese and Indian ethnic groups). However, regardless of the fact that the Razak Report 1956 consolidated main ideas from the Barnes Report 1951 and the Fenn Wu Report 1952, many believed that the Razak Report 1956 was done in haste, and that it had overlooked many cultural and social aspects. From the perspectives of the three major ethnic groups of Malaya (i.e., Malays, Chinese, and Indians), the report imparted negative consequences for these races respectively—especially with regards to their cultural and social identity as well as their ethnic interests. Nevertheless, when seen from the historical, sociopolitical, and educational point of view, the Razak Report, regardless of the concerns people had of it, still rendered its relevance and importance in the Malaysian education system and Malaysia itself.

History of and Prior Education in Malaya

Malaysia was first known as '*Tanah Melayu*' (translated as *Malay Land*). During the 15th century, Tanah Melayu prospered due to the booming of the commerce and trade that took place in the region. Before long Tanah Melayu was recognized and sought after by many western countries that wanted to occupy it due to its strategic geographical setting and the wealth of raw materials in the nation. Tanah Melayu had over 300 years of colonization from the Portuguese, Dutch, British, and Japanese. However, the longest colonization was that of the British, i.e., late



18th century until mid-20th century, from whence they changed the name of the then Tanah Melayu to Malaya. In extracting the lavish resources of raw materials that Malaya had at that time, the British also brought in the Chinese and the Indians (from China and India, respectively) to blend in with the small minority communities of Chinese and Indian, who settled in Tanah Melayu from activities of trade and commerce. The British separated all three major ethnic groups according to their geographical settings and in terms of their means of living. The Chinese were to work on tin mining and small businesses; the Indians were to work at palm and rubber estates and also on railroads; while the majority of Malays were subjected to work as farmers and fishermen.

During the British colonization, the British realized the importance of educating the people of Malaya as they need people to work for them, especially with hard labor for the immense trade of raw materials that took place. To educate the people of Malaya (i.e., especially the Malay ethnic group that made the majority of people of Malaya), the British introduced educational institutions namely the Government Schools, Government Malay Schools, and other non-government education institutions, e.g., the Methodist and Convent schools. As for the Chinese and the Indians, they were encouraged by the British to bring their own educational structures from their own countries respectively. With the help of the British, the Chinese and Indians managed to set up schools for their children, in which the syllabi and books were shipped from their own countries. They also hired teachers from their own countries (i.e., China and India) to come and teach their children. The language of instruction within these schools were in their own native tongues (i.e., Kuo Yu or Mandarin language, and Tamil language), and the content of their education was also concerning their own countries.

However, these education system and the school institutions—especially those for the Malay ethnic group—were not received well by the Malays. The Malays felt that there was an obvious segregation of these ethnic groups and difference in their education philosophies that further enhanced the segregation of these ethnic groups. There were also many other reasons for their dissent of the British education system, such being the schools provided by the British tended to cater only for children of wealthy people; the language of instruction was fully in English—hence denying their sense of cultural identity; the education syllabi was from England and did not cater to the social and cultural needs of the Malay people; fear of Christian indoctrination that especially might contradict with their Moslem values; and scrutiny for the subjects taught, especially the emphasis for vocational studies, in which Malay students were forced to focus on learning agriculture and farming.

These education systems introduced by the British continued to be applied throughout Malaya—regardless of the resistance of the Malay people—until later in 1942, when Japan occupied Malaya during the World War II. During the three year period of the Japanese reign, they revamped the British education system to cater to their own Japanese education. During the Japanese reign, the education for the people of Malaya was done in Japanese language and the content of education was on Japan. However, the Japanese reign was not long due to their surrender in the year 1945, following the bombing of Nagasaki and Hiroshima. As the Japanese made their exit, the British returned and the previous education system that was introduced by the British was resumed.

Malayan Independence and the Birth of the Razak Report

With the retreat of the Japanese from Malaya and the return of the British, the people of Malaya, inspired by the Japanese growth, diligence, and resistance against the Western powers—albeit their lost in the World War II—arose in quest for independence from the British. These people, led by mostly intellectuals, royalties, and aristocrats (those who, ironically, received British education), relentlessly demanded from the British for independence. The British grew concerned with the rise of the people of Malaya, especially with the oppositions against many British economical and political policies at that time, and were forced to grant independence to Malaya. This, however, was done with a compromise. The British devised a treaty to grant independence to Malaya if the people of Malaya could to come up with a proper political system and educational structure that would integrate all the ethnic groups in Malaya that would be under British supervision until 1967. During this period of supervision, the people of Malaya (i.e., Malays, Chinese, and Indians) were not to have any political, economic, and social disturbances



that would jeopardize the people of Malaya, or the British would take over the country again. From this point on, the Report of the Education Committee 1956 was born.

The Report of the Education Committee 1956, or better known as the Razak Report, was planned and developed from September 1955 until its complement in April 1956, which is one year prior to Malayan Independence (i.e., 1957). The head of this committee was the Honourable Minister of Education, Dato' Abdul Razak Bin Hussain (hence the report's name). The report was written by 13 committee members made of mixed ethnicities (i.e., Malay, Chinese, and Indian ministers and education experts). They were Mr. V. T. Sambanthan (Minister for Labour), Mr. Suleiman Dato' Abdul Rahman (Minister for Natural Resources and Local Government), Mr. Abdul Aziz Hj Abdul Majid (Minister for State of Selangor), Mr. Shamsuddin Naim (Minister for State of Negeri Sembilan), Mr. Too Joon Hing (Assistant Minister for Education), Mr. Abdul Rahman Talib (Assistant Minister for Natural Resources and Local Government), Mr. Goh Chee Yan, Mr. Zainul Abidin Sultan Mydin, Dr. Lim Chong Eu, Mr. Abdul Hamid Khan Hj Sakhawat Ali Khan, Mr. Leung Cheung Ling, Mr. Mohamed Ghazali Jawi, Mr. Lee Thuan Hin, and Mr. Mohamed Idris Mat Sil.

The report was made by referring to educational structures of two commonwealth countries, namely India and Bangladesh, and also the educational structure of the British educational structure that was currently employed during that time, i.e., the Education Ordinance 1952. The main constitutions and terms of reference of the Razak Report 1956 are as follows:

- a) To examine the present education policy of the Federation of Malaya and to recommend any alterations or adaptations that are necessary with a view to establishing a national system of education acceptable to the people of the Federation as a whole which will satisfy their needs and promote their cultural, social, economic and political development as a nation, having regard to the intention to make Malay the national language of the country whilst preserving and sustaining the growth of the language and culture of other communities living in the country
- b) For this purpose to examine the educational structure of the country including such provisions of the Education Ordinance, 1952, as may require alternations or adaptations and the measures for its implementation contained in Council Paper on educational policy No. 67 or 1954.

The Razak Report committee's main task was to plan for the immediate future within the next ten years, which would be a transitional period in Malayan education. They were entrusted to develop an educational policy that was acceptable to the people of the Malaya as a whole (especially the three major ethnic groups of Malays, Chinese, and Indian). In developing this educational structure, they were also to make the Malay language as the national language of the country, whilst preserving and sustaining the growth of the languages and cultures of the non-Malays. In this regard, the committee was assigned to develop an educational structure that can bring together the children of all races under a national educational system in which the national language is the main language of instruction. Furthermore, the committee's task was to create a plan for schools with a Malayan outlook through common syllabus for all schools, and to follow the same curriculum.

In realizing these goals, the committee planned to establish a general structure of education, such as establishment of local education authorities, board of governors for all schools, and independent inspectorates to foresee and supervise the education plan that was to be carried out. These local education authorities were also to educate teachers and school administrators the change in status and conditions of service of teachers. They also planned to establish primary education with Malay language as the language of instruction and development of schools of similar type where this would involve plans for training of teachers, education for over-aged students, and entry to primary schools. The committee also planned to establish a national type of secondary school system that will work to a common syllabus and for common examination. This was where there would be flexibility in the curriculum in allowing schools to give special attention to particular Malayan languages and cultures, and where grants will be will given at uniform rates to all national-type secondary schools. They also planned to establish a common



content syllabus practiced by all schools; and to establish a ground of schooling where opportunities for progress for each pupil according to his ability would be provided, irrespective of the type of primary school attended.

The Razak Report: Concerns vs. Relevance

As mentioned before, the Razak Report 1956 was implemented not without concerns. During its implementation, the Razak Report 1956 was not well received by the Chinese and Indians for fear of losing their cultural identities and forsaking their social needs. There was also fear that the standard of education would not be at par with the previously practiced British education system. Within this notion, many people argued against the use of Malay language as the language of instruction; the establishment of standard and standard-type schools; and the use of common syllabus for all standard and standard-type schools. Moreover, people also argued against the Razak Report 1956 in terms of the administrative loopholes that it seemed to portray, such as the focus of training more teachers in vocational studies; the decision to keep the Methodist and Convent schools; the problem of over-aged students; and also the involvement of local education authorities in educational administration.

Standard of education.

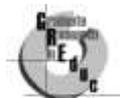
The most debated aspect in the report was the concern that the standard of the proposed education system will not at par with the previous British educational system. Particularly, the fact that too much emphasis on Malay language in instruction and as school subject was often heavily debated by the non-Malays who felt that English language was better for education instruction in terms of achieving good standards. People feared that students were still fresh from learning either in English or in their native mother tongues that they would have problems with the change of language of instruction. They also argued that the report did not take into consideration the Chinese and Indian students who spoke little to nothing of Malay language.

The non-Malays were also fearful if Malay language were made the language of instruction they would lose their Chinese and Indian cultural identities. This argument was highlighted with the inconsistencies of the use of Malay language as the language of instruction where according to the Razak Report 1956, in primary schools the language of instruction is Malay language, but in secondary schools the language of instruction can either be English or Malay. Many people feared that this would create confusion for students and teachers across levels, especially in the transition period that would take post-primary school, and pre-secondary school.

In truth, as these arguments were made, many realized that Malaya at that time was striving for independence. And with the many races that were living in Malaya then that it was almost impossible for them to live independent of each other. The Malays, Chinese, and Indians have become economically interdependent of each other, yet they were socially very apart from one another. This was because the Malays were the largest majority, and they monopolized the land and real estate; whereas the Chinese monopolized the business and raw material industry (e.g., tin mining); the Indians, on the other hand, monopolized the estates and other raw materials. Their inability to work together would result in economic instability in building a new nation.

In realization of the interdependence of each of these ethnic groups onto one another, the committee, with the thought of Malays making the majority, proposed that Malay language to be made the national language. The fact that Malay language was made the national language chimed the importance of its teaching in schools so that it can be practiced and mastered by all people of Malaya, especially the younger generation. The Malay language was seen as an important tool for unity of a nation that could bring all the races together, so that all races could speak in the same language for the purpose of better understanding of each other. The philosophical notion behind this move was to build an identity for the nation.

In regards of the concern for the cultural indoctrination—that the Chinese and Indians had that presumably would be imposed with the language of instruction in Malay language—this notion was actually taken into consideration with the establishment of standard-type school for Chinese and Indians. This was where in these standard-type schools, teachers could teach either using the Malay language or in Kuo Yu language (Chinese native tongue), or Tamil language



(Indian native tongue), if needed by these ethnic groups with regards to the level of Malay language proficiency of the non-Malay students. With this regard, the report strived on the philosophical notion of building identity at an early stage, and was careful not to abandon the cultural identities of the non-Malays. In fact, the introduction of the Malay language as a language of instruction was also to make the non-Malays to be fluent in the Malay language, which was also the proposed national language. Meanwhile, the language of instruction in secondary schools were given leniency to be either Malay language or English language, so as not to disrupt the means of instruction and the flow of education that was already commencing at that time.

The second prominent concern raised was against the Razak Report 1956 was on the establishment of standard schools and standard-type schools. As mentioned in the report, the standard school was open for all races, not just Malays. However, the majority of students in these schools were still Malay students, and many standard schools were attended only by Malays, especially in non-developed, rural areas. The Chinese and Indians were concerned in sending their children in the standard schools for fear of racial discrimination, therefore only sent their children to the standard-type schools that catered more to their preference and social security. On the other hand, with establishment of the standard-type schools, the Malays were concerned that their establishment would be similar to the vernacular schools for Chinese and Indians that were established during the British reign. Their establishment came under scrutiny as the Malays believe that the Indians and Chinese should be harmoniously integrated with the Malay population, and learn in the Malay language. The Malays were fearful of ethnic segregation, different standards of education, and especially the different content of education if schools were segregated between the Malays and the non-Malays.

In response to these concerns, the Razak Report 1956 committee believed that it was imperative to establish the standard and standard-type schools in the early period of transition. The committee decided to have the standard schools to be attended by all races so that the goals of the educational structure would be achieved, that is to give education to all children regardless of race. The committee also realized that the non-Malays would be hesitant to send their children to the standard schools because of problems in terms of socio-cultural insecurity and the geographical remoteness of the settlements (especially for Malay and Indian settlements). Moreover, quite a number of the Chinese and Indians were not ready to go to standard schools (where the majority was Malay students) and to learn in Malay language, because of fear of racial discrimination and cultural indoctrination by the Malays. Because of these reasons, the standard-type schools were established for them—again with the aim of education for all. In addressing this concern, the education of teachers was focused not only on the Malays, but on all ethnic groups (i.e. Chinese and Indians). This concern was also dealt with the establishment of independent inspectorates, in which all of these schools were to be often inspected to identify social and administrative problems that these schools would have in the hope of resolving them for their betterment.

The third major concern was the decrease of the standard of the education with the use of common syllabus for all standard schools and standard-type schools. As the notion of common syllabus was supported by the Malays, it was opposed by a few concerned bodies from the Chinese community. This was again because of fear for lost of cultural identity as during this time (1950s) as the Chinese still regarded China as the Mother Land where the profits gained from Malaya would still be sent back to their families and to the government of China. This was one of the toughest tasks for the committee in the development of the education report. Even though the people of Malaya realized that social integration was important in planning for the immediate future, a few were still gripping firm to their social inheritance and cultural roots. In fighting this notion, the committee, especially those of Chinese ethnicity worked hard in convincing their counterparts of the goals of the report, for social integration, and to accept Malaya as their new country. In this regards, the Kuo Yu language was made the alternate language of instruction for Chinese students in primary schools (as Tamil language for the Indians), and more Chinese teachers were hired to fill the void of the lack of Chinese teachers.



New educational structure.

There were also concerns regarding the administration and organization of the new educational structure that was proposed by the Razak Report 1956. An argument was made that the report was too focused on training new teachers for Malay language and technical and vocational courses. Many Malays who were very passionate and ambitious in building a nation argued that the Razak Report 1956 was still practicing the British educational system, which was to educate people to be confined only in becoming farmers. Yet, the Malays wanted to be more involved in the development and administration of the nation. The Malays were no longer interested to be farmers and vocational workers, and they wanted the new educational structure to emphasize more on learning science and technology to enable them to become people of an independent nation.

This particular concern was actually well taken into consideration by the committee in their plan. In actuality, in the Razak Report 1956 the emphasis was more on technical and vocational education, and that the vocational education was more varied than the ones introduced by the British, which focused merely on farming skills. The vocational skills that would be educated were more varied and within many fields, such as agriculture, machinery, carpentry, and electrical skills. The Razak Report 1956 also focused on educating new teachers on and about varied vocational skills so that they can inform their students about job opportunities to the future generations of Malaysians. Through means of knowledge impartment, the committee focused on informing the new generation of new occupations that will be made available for them along with progress and independence of Malaya in the near future, and that they would not be confined to become only a farmer or a vocational worker, but more varied occupational opportunities in varied fields of interest.

The second major concern regarding the administration of the new educational structure is that many Malays, especially those who did not received British education or went to the Convent and Methodist schools, were concerned of the continuity of these schools after the departure of the British. The decision to keep these schools was opposed by many Malays at the lower socio-economic status at that time—especially those who were very religious and in strong belief of Islamic values—for fear that these schools would promote Christianity and indoctrinate Christian beliefs into their children. The Razak Report 1956 committee, however, believed that the preservation and continuity of these Christian-based schools was important in educating non-Muslim students, especially due to the fact that many Indians and Chinese were Christians. Moreover, the report itself acknowledged the roles of these institutions in educating the people of Malaya during the British colonization. Over time, the Malays realized that these schools were needed by the Malays from the higher middle class, and also Indians and Chinese whom many were Christians. The Malays also later realized the importance of mastering the English language, which was heavily promoted by the Methodist and Convent schools. The Malays realized the opportunities that mastery of English language can bring for occupation and knowledge to the younger generations, especially with the learning of English language as Malaya's second language.

The third problem in terms of organization of the educational structure was education for over-aged students. Many students (especially those who had not received secondary education) at that time were already working, and some did not see the relevance of secondary education in improving their lives as many were farmers, fishermen, and small businessmen, who did not rely much on formal education to work. Moreover, some were embarrassed to go to schools at an old age. Thus, the committee made it a point in the report to enable all people over the age of schooling to receive education through means of evening classes and part-time education that would be offered to them. Evening classes for older students were held in the same vicinities of schools attended by the children. This was where the schools (i.e., standard and standard-type schools) that would be attended by children in the morning would be attended by the over-aged students in the evening. The subjects in the evening classes are similar to those learned by their children in the morning classes such as basic literacy skills, mathematics, and so on. Those who were older (i.e., senior citizens) were also encouraged to attend evening schools where they were taught the basic knowledge of reading, writing and mathematics, and even religious subjects. For those undertaking these evening classes, or part-time education, the subjects were not similar to



those of the children's education, but catered more to the needs and professional development of the over-aged students. This was where the part-time education was catered for over-aged students who have received education in the past, but had to stop school because of various reasons, such as poverty, involvement in the British army during World War II, and so on. The subjects in part-time education varied from teaching the basic literacy knowledge, to teaching skills, such as shorthand, journalism, typing skills, and other occupation-related skills.

In the administration of the new educational structure there was also concern with the involvement of local education authorities who were made up of various bodies of administration. These bodies were made from ethnographic structure of people within an area (e.g., settlements or villages), such as the head of village, religious bodies, and other independent bodies and businesses. People fear that these local authorities, as being established from non-professionals of education, might not have proper knowledge of academic administration and educational expertise. Furthermore, the Chinese and Indians did not have as many local education authorities as the Malays had as prior to the new education plan they were reliant of education authorities from their own countries.

In this regard, the committee decided to recruit and acknowledge these authorities to cushion the flow of currency with regards to the establishment of schools and facilities. These bodies, however, managed to help tremendously in the materialization of the education itself such as building of schools, chairs, tables, furniture, stationeries, and also means of transportation for students whose home were far from schools. Moreover, these bodies were inspected by the independent inspectorates appointed by the committee through time. In all, their establishment was part of the notion of planning for the immediate future, to make education available to everyone, and to make everyone understand the importance of education in building a nation. Through this means, people of Malaya had a first-hand role in the development of the education system themselves, not just the policy makers and politicians.

Conclusion

In sum, the Razak Report 1956 was very imperative in the development of the nation and the Malaysian education system. From the historical and educational point of view, the Razak Report 1956, regardless of the concerns raised, was extremely relevant and important in the Malayan and Malaysian education system. The development and implementation of the Razak Report 1956 was imperative to Malaysians as a whole as it was a starting point to a nation. Apart from providing an educational structure for the people of Malaya, the Razak Report 1956 served a higher purpose—one that is true to the core value of education—that is to develop a nation and the future generation.

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