

" WHAT DO MALAY SCHOOLTEACHERS READ "
A STUDY OF 17 TEACHERS FROM 2 MALAY SCHOOLS

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1948, the number of Malay school teachers teaching in all Govern-
ment Primary Malay schools was 402. Therefore there is the figure

ability of an untrained person, without any previous experience at all, carrying out such a project in a limited time (September / December 1958) single-handed.

CHAPTER 1

Thus, taking account of practical difficulties, the advice given was that the writer should concentrate on two sample schools, and make a personal and intensive study of the reading habits of the teachers at these two schools. The two schools selected are:

PURPOSE

The purpose of this academic exercise is originally to find out, on an experimental scale, what Malay schoolteachers in Singapore read. The schoolteachers are a definite and organised group of the Malay population, and they form the "Intellectual" group of the community. "Intellectual" is taken to mean here as pertaining to reading, writing, painting and other creative works. This group is important because they have the serious responsibility of educating 14,902 Malay schoolchildren in Government Primary Malay schools in Singapore. It would be interesting to know the kind of magazine and books these teachers read, for the kind of reading they do would influence them, and in turn, influence the children they teach.

SCOPE AND AREA FOR STUDY

Practical considerations, however, do not allow a real and thorough-going study of the problem. According to the figures obtained from the Ministry of Education, on January 1st, 1958, the number of Malay schoolteachers teaching at all Government Primary Malay schools totals 402. Therefore there is the impossi-

bility of an untrained person, without any previous experience at all, carrying out such a project in a limited time (September / December 1958), single-handed.

Thus, taking account of practical difficulties, the advice given was that the writer should concentrate on two sample schools, and make a personal and intensive study of the reading done by the teachers at those two schools. The two schools selected are :

1. Tanjong Katong Malay School.
(morning and afternoon)
2. Tanah Merah Besar Malay School.
(morning and afternoon)

The Tanjong Katong Malay School is situated within the Singapore town area, while Tanah Merah Besar Malay school is within the rural area. The number of teachers in each school is a fair average of the number of Malay schoolteachers in any Malay school in Singapore.¹

There are certain limitations and advantages in this choice. Although each school is a mixed school, there ^{are} ~~is~~ no Malay women teachers. In Tanjong Katong Malay School, there are 3 non-Malay teachers teaching English, 2 of whom are women. In Tanah Merah Besar Malay School there are 2 non-Malay teachers of English, both women. But these women teachers could not help much in the study although personally cooperative. They ^{do} ~~not~~ know much of Malay literature and so could throw no interesting light upon the issue. This exercise is therefore a study of the reading done by the exclusively male teachers

¹ ^{average-size} In any one Malay School there are about 14 teachers. FOR THE TEACHERS IN THE 2 SCHOOLS, SEE ^{appendix} INDEX AT THE BACK.

of the two schools.

It is not unexpected that these teachers do not live near the areas of the two schools. They are scattered all over the island, at Geylang, Changi, Bedok, Katong, etc. These are the areas where most of the Malays in Singapore are living. Geographically, at least, these teachers are representative of the Malay schoolteachers in Singapore.

The teachers of these two schools are representative of the 3 types of training received by Malay Teachers teaching in Malay schools in Singapore. As elaborated in the next chapter, these teachers are (a) Those trained at the Sultan Idris Training College, Tanjong Malim (b) Those having finished Std.VII, the highest class in Malay schools and (c) Those having a senior Cambridge School Certificate. Both group (b) and (c) have to undergo 3 years Normal Training.

PROCEDURE AND METHOD

The whole study was done on a questionnaire - plus - interview basis. After getting a letter of approval from the Ministry of Education, and a letter of introduction from the Head of the Department of Malay Studies,¹ the writer went to the two schools and obtained the permission of the Headmasters to interview the teachers. Appointments were made to see the teachers at their own homes.

Each interview consisted of 3 sheets of questionnaire² which were completed by the interviewee himself with the

¹ Tuan Haji Zainal Abidin bin Ahmad.

² See index at the back.

assistance of the writer. Then followed a free discussion of average 1 hour. The questionnaire collected certain personal data and took an inventory of all the newspapers, magazines and books found in the house. The discussion was used to clarify certain points of interest.

This academic exercise is then the result of the study and the conclusions drawn from the necessarily very limited material obtained. Chapter 11 gives in brief personal data concerning the teachers, but chapter 111 and 1V are the main part of this study which is "What do Malay schoolteachers read. A study of 17 teachers from 2 Malay schools.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The writer wishes to record her gratitude for the kindness and full cooperation shown by the Headmasters of the 2 schools and the teachers she interviewed. (1)

Thanks are also due to all who have kindly given the writer advice and assistance in any form.

Number	Age	Marital status	Years of teaching

11	25	Single	1 to 5 years
1	24	Married	1 to 5 "
5	between 21 & 34	"	6 to 12 "
2	42 & 45	"	25 to 30 "

(1) List of names in ^{appendix} ~~index~~ at the back.

CHAPTER 11

THE TEACHERS

For the purpose of this academic exercise, 17 teachers (all men) were interviewed and studied by the writer. These teachers are from the two (Primary) Government schools mentioned in the introduction.

One important fact that struck the writer, and which certainly influenced the conclusions drawn from the study, is the youth and inexperience of most of the teachers in the sample group. Of the 17 teachers, 12 are under 24, and 11 of the 12 are still single. The teaching experience of these young teachers varies from less than a year to five years.

Only 3 other teachers are over 25 and have more than 6 years' teaching' experience. The 2 Headmasters of the schools are over 40 and have, on the average, 30 years' teaching experience.

These figures are summarised in the table below.

Number	Age	Marital status	Years of Teaching
11	under 24	Single	1 to 5 years
1	" 24	Married	1 to 5 "
3	between 25 & 34	"	6 to 12 "
2	" 40 & 45	"	28 to 30 "

In Malay schools there ^{are in} addition, teachers who teach in English from std.V to VII. There are 152 of these teachers in Malay schools in Singapore. There are 2 of these teachers of English in each of the two schools ~~the~~ studied. They are non-Malays, and are unable to help the writer in the study. (ii) They have family responsibility.

The number of teachers in each group is set out below :

(1)	S. I. T. C.	— 5 —	23, 24, 26, 28, 41	age
(11)	Malay School	— 8 —	19, 20, 21, 22, 22, 23, 24, 44"	
(111)	School Certificate	— 4 —	20, 21, 23, 24	"

The most mature group is obviously the teachers who have been to Tanjong Malim. Of the other two groups 9 are still under training (3 of group (111) and 6 of group (11)). This means, more than half of the teachers studied are still under training.

The writer discovered that practically all the teachers take a share in family responsibility. This finding is summarised in the table below :

Number of Teachers	Marital status	Responsibility
9	single	1 to 5 people
1	"	5 to 10 "
1	"	- "
4	married	1 to 5 "
2	"	5 to 10 "

No.	Monthlies	buy	borrow	read occasionally	Script
1	Mustika	5	6	3	Jawi
2	Malayan Monthly	4	-	-	English
3	Mutiara	2	-	1	Jawi
4	Dewan Bahasa	2	-	-	Rumi
5	Readers' Digest	2	1	-	English

Below are listed the features most popular in these periodicals. The list is undoubtedly inadequate and the writer feels it is applicable more to the weeklies than the monthlies.

<u>Features</u>	<u>Frequency of mention</u>
1. Short story	16
2. Sports	11
3. Film news	6
4. Poems of literary articles	4
5. Comics	4
6. Other things	-

CONCLUSION

Especially in the case of the weeklies, the "Utusan Film dan Sport", "Weekender" and "Gelanggang Film", the periodicals are read for their entertainment value. On an average the writer found that a teacher buys one periodical, whether weekly or monthly. Some teachers buy two, while the 2

Those supported are parents or brothers and sisters many of whom are still ^{at} school.

Thus, for the teachers as a whole, certain facts are common :

(1) They are young.

(11) They have family responsibility.

PLACE OF ORIGIN

SUMMARY This table is ^a summary of the place of birth of the teachers and their parents.

Place	Father	Mother	Self
Singapore	9	12	15
Federation	3	4	2
Indonesia	5	1	-

All 17 ^{teachers} were born in Singapore or the Federation. 5 have fathers of Indonesian origin (Java or Sumatra) and 1 has a mother born in Indonesia.

7 have relatives who are also teachers. Reasons stated for becoming teachers vary from natural inclination to the idea that teaching is the best possible job considering qualifications. Only 3 have held another job previously, but all agree that they have no intention of changing their job.

	Name	buy	borrow	read occasionally	Rumi / Jawi
1	Utusan Melayu	6	4	4	Jawi
2	Berita Harian	6	1	3	Rumi
3	Straits Times	4	1	2	English
4	Singapore Std.	1	1	1	"

When asked for the particular features in the newspapers that interest, the teachers are definite in giving a list of general headings of the type of features they like to read. This would lead to the not improbable conclusion that the features set out below, listed in order of frequency of mention, are the sections of the newspapers followed very closely, while the others are just glanced at in a cursory way.

<u>Features</u>	<u>Frequency of mention</u>
1. Local news	14
2. Foreign news	11
3. Sports	11
4. Editorial	6
5. Comics	3
6. Politics	3
7. News about villages	2
8. News about schools	1

In conclusion it must be commented that newspapers are the cheapest and most convenient kind of reading material. They cost only 15 cts a copy. The Sunday edition of these papers are 20 cts each and in addition to the usual news, contain short stories, comic strips, film news, literary criticism and other articles of interest. The newspapers are easy to read and do not take too much of one's time or thought. They are socially useful as possible topics of conversation or discussion eg. the problems of other Malay schoolteachers in the Federation. Thus local news, of interest to every well-informed man, stands high in the list of popular features.

(b) THE PERIODICALS

These could be divided into (a) the weeklies (b) the monthlies. The weeklies look like newspapers, but they are smaller and contain more pages. The monthlies are even smaller, the average being 10" X 7 $\frac{1}{4}$ " and usually having an illustrated arts-paper cover clipped to the content. A weekly periodical costs about 30 cts whereas a monthly periodical costs about 50 cts. Below are tabulated the weeklies and monthlies found at the teachers' homes.

No.	Weeklies	buy	borrow	read occasionally	Script
1	Utusan Film dan sport	6	4	3	Jawi
2	Weekender	2	1	3	English
3	Gelanggang Film	1	-	1	Jawi

1. S. I. T. C. trained ——— 5 teachers.
2. Malay School " " ——— 8 " " " " " "
3. English school " " ——— 4 " " " " " "

GROUP 1.

BOOKS READ THIS MONTH AND PERSONAL BOOKS ACTUALLY PREFERRED

The facts obtained on the books read and the type of books actually liked are summarised below.

No.	Books read this month	Script	Type	Books actually liked	Type of books preferred
1	-	-	-	Fiction & history	Indon. & Malay
2	1	Rumi	Detective	Detective	" "
3	1	Jawi	Fiction	Fiction & history	Malay & Indon.
4	1	Jawi	Detective	Detective & history	Indon. & Malay
5	1	Jawi	Detective	Detective & history	Malay & Indon.

The table shows that on an average, teachers in this group read one book per month. The book is in every case fiction. 3 of the books read are detective stories. 2 of these detective novels are publications from Medan, a "Roman Detetip" in Rumi script and of a sensational nature. The other one is published locally, ^{its} script in Jawi. The remaining book is a romantic novel, a Malay book in Jawi script.

Teachers in this group say they like to read detec-

tive stories, fiction (here meaning romantic novels) and historical novels. Indonesian and Malay books are equally liked, perhaps with a greater preference for Indonesian books.

The summary of books found at these teachers' homes is given below :

No.	Non-fiction	Fiction	Indonesia	Malay	English	Rumi	Jawi	Summary	Total
1	59	10	12	46	11	40	18	General	69
2	27	76	43	59	1	69	33	Detective	103
3	34	9	31	4	8	21	14	Gen.& Text.	43
4	3	42	41	4	-	41	4	Detective	45
5	8	5	8	5	-	8	5	General	13

The books found at their homes correlate with the information given by the previous tables.

The books are generally divided into (1) non-fiction and (2) fiction. 3 of these teachers have more non-fiction books in their home library than fictions. These non-fiction are on general subjects. Mostly they are on education, language (Malay) and history. The fictions owned by these 3 teachers are ⁽¹⁾ generally found at any bookshop in Singapore.

The other 2 teachers have a preponderance of fiction. These are detective novels. They are Medan — publications.

Indonesian and Malay books are equally represented

with slightly more of Indonesian books. English books are also present, but they are just for "attempts to read English" (as said by one teacher). There are more of books in Rumi script than Jawi.

GROUP 11.

BOOKS READ AND BOOKS FOUND AT HOME

No.	Books read this month	Script	Type	Books actually liked	Type of books preferred
1	-	-	-	-	Malay
2	-	-	-	Religion & general	Malay
3	1	Jawi	Relig.	Religion & fiction	Indonesian
4	-	-	-	-	-
5	1	Rumi	fict.	Fiction	Malay
6	3	Jawi	"	Fiction & history	Malay
7	3	Rumi	Non-fiction	History	
8	1	Rumi	2.fict-Fict.-	Fiction	Indonesian

The table shows that 5 of the 8 teachers in this group read at least 1 book in the last 4 weeks when the data was collected. The books read range from fiction to religion. The fiction here are again those books one finds at Singapore bookshops eg. "Korban Kinabalu". The 2 non-fictional books

read are on religion and history. The teachers in this group prefer fiction, history and religion. All except 2 say that they prefer Malay books.

Teachers no.5, 6, 7 read text-books (fiction used for their exam) and so cannot be said to read because they like it. Only teachers 3 & 8 really read a book personally liked, and later it can be seen that the books in their possession prove that only these 2 teachers can be called serious readers.

Summary of books found at home :

No.	Non-fiction.	Fiction	Malay	Indon.	Engl.	Rumi	Jawi	Summary	total
1	45	32	62	5	-	14	63	Fiction	77
2	46	12	26	32	-	12	46	Old religious.	58
3	12	17	3	26	-	26	3	Indones. Modern	29
4	24	1	4	-	24	4		Eng.text books	25
5	14	1	15			14	1	Eng.text books	15
6	61	6	41		26	31	10	Eng.text +general	67
7	37	4	17	9	21	18	2	Eng.text +general	41
8	5	10	2	13		13	2	Modern Indones.	15

There are more non-fiction books than fiction in the home-libraries of teachers in this group. As seen in the table above, English text-books form the greater number of

GROUP 111.

No.	Books read this month	Type	TYPE OF BOOKS ACTUALLY Preferred	PREFERENCE FOR ENGLISH/INDONESIAN/MALAY
1	3	Text	-	English
2	4	"	Romances	English
3	3	fiction	fiction	English+Indonesian
4	2	general	general	English

The table shows that these teachers read more books than teachers in the other groups. But it must be added that teachers 1 & 2 read text-books, and in interviews told the writer they do not like reading.

The other 2 teachers revealed that they are keen readers. No.3 prefers fiction and literary books, and the books he had been reading in the last four weeks are on elementary psychology and literature.

The other teacher reads book on economics and said he did not like fiction very much.

All 4 teachers said they prefer English books to either Malay or Indonesian books. ~~the list~~. Only No.3 in the list liked Indonesian books at all.

No.	Non-fiction	fiction	Engl.	Malay	Indo.	Rumi	Jawi	Summary	
1	48	-	46	2	-	2	-	Text-books	48
2	75	-	43	30	-	25	5	" " + general	75
3	52	53	87	11	7	14	4	Text-books + literat-	105
4	93	15	88	79	1	15	5	General	108