

## **MORAL EDUCATION IN TAMIL PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN MALAYSIA: A LOOK INTO REALITY**

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**Abstract.** The social issues and gangsterism rates among Indian adolescents have been in the rise in Malaysia over the last decade (Jabatan Siasatan Jenayah, Polis Diraja Malaysia, 2003). As academics in fields of humanities and language, the researchers writing this paper wanted to specifically initiate and analyse the teaching of Moral Education in Tamil vernacular primary schools in Malaysia. These subject has been questioned and brought up by educators and students involved in these schools. The issue is whether Moral Education (ME) is actually being implemented in Tamil Primary schools is looked into. This paper discusses the way ME is foreseen and being implemented in Tamil vernacular schools especially in Year 6 when students are prepared for their first centralised examination. It also looks into the effects of values education for Primary 6 Tamil students who move into another dimension of education when they are in Form One secondary classes.

**Keywords:** Moral Education, Tamil vernacular school, social problem

### **INTRODUCTION**

It is accepted widely that the Indian community in Malaysia puts importance into family and spiritual values (Asma Abdullah, 1996). They are a closely knitted community who preserve cultural and social values and traditions. The families ensure children are brought up within the socio-moral cultural norms. However, in reality, the social problems and criminal cases involving Indian youths are increasing by the day (*Sunday Star*, 2011). This creates a mismatch between the communal Indian values and the behaviour of the Indian adolescents who are involved in social mishaps and commit crimes in the society.

Moral Education (ME) was introduced in schools for the non-Muslim cohort in the 1980s. One of the rationales of introducing ME was to curb social ills. Another reason was to complement Islamic Studies which is being taught to Muslim students. ME in Malaysia focusses upon three domains: moral thinking, moral feeling and moral action to be taught and instilled among students (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2000). This is essential for students especially

students from primary vernacular schools as they prepare themselves for secondary education where they would be studying, communicating and socialising with students of other ethnicities, religion and traditions. ME provides space for students to analyse their own communal values and understand and respect values of other ethnicity groups as well. This research was undertaken to identify the extent to which ME is being taught and implemented in primary Tamil schools.

## **MORAL EDUCATION IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS**

Moral Education is a core subject in all primary schools inclusive of National primary schools, Chinese and Tamil vernacular schools. The focus of the subject is on cultivating, appreciating and practicing the “noble virtues” of Malaysian society (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2000). It is hoped that the subject will contribute to deliver students who are knowledgeable, have noble personalities, and who are polite and willing to contribute towards the development of the nation. However, ME is designed to cater for non-Muslim students while Muslim students study Islamic studies. The allocation of time to teach ME varies according to type of primary schools in Malaysia. In National type primary schools, 6 periods of 30 minutes, which accounts for 180 minutes per week is for teaching and learning of ME. In Tamil primary schools from Year 1 to Year 6, 5 periods (150 minutes) per week is allocated for ME.

However, due to examination pressure and priorities for examination subjects in Year 6 (Primary School Assessment Examination), the implementation of Moral Education in Tamil primary schools need detailed consideration. A pilot study was conducted in 20 schools around Klang Valley. Among the 20 schools, Moral Education is taught in 5 schools at Year 6 level. In the remaining 15 schools, Moral Education is not taught or only taught after the UPSR examinations. Instead, subjects such as Mathematics, Science, Malay and English languages take the ME slots.

## **RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

This research was undertaken to identify the extent to which ME is taught to Year 6 students in primary Tamil vernacular schools. This data is necessary to conduct further researches in values education practised in vernacular schools and how such values transform into the Indian community. Firstly, this research will provide an overview about issues that ME is only recorded in Year 6 school timetable but the allocated time is used for other academic subjects. Second, the data collected would be used as a stepping-stone to analyse the discipline and

noble values practiced by students in Tamil primary schools and the connectivity as they progress into secondary schools. At the moment there aren't any research conducted to compare noble values practiced by Indian adolescents in Malaysia and their behaviour and character in school and in society.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

A survey method was used to obtain information from 138 Tamil school teachers. According to Cozby (2003), survey research uses questionnaires and interviews to obtain information from people about various matters. These include attitudes, beliefs, demographics, perceptions and other facts and past or future behaviours. In this study, the focus of the survey is to extract facts and demographics about the teaching of ME to Year 6 Tamil primary students. Factual questions initiate what teachers know about the subject and how it is being implemented.

### **Type of Respondent**

All respondents are teachers from 138 schools from the existing 523 (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2010) Tamil schools, which are located in West Malaysia. Their responses will represent the general scenario of implementation of ME in Tamil schools as a whole in Malaysia.

### **Procedural Methods**

Each respondent was provided with a survey form, which requires them to:

- i. List activities conducted during ME periods.
- ii. Write consequences of teaching/not teaching ME during ME periods in Year 6.
- iii. Suggest their thoughts and ideas on how to implement ME for Year 6 ME students.

Data was collected individually. To safeguard the confidentiality of the respondents, teachers were only asked to provide their age, gender and the state they are teaching in. Teachers were involved anonymously. Data was collected and analysed quantitatively and qualitatively. Data was kept and analysed by the researchers only. Each individual respondent is given a coding number during the process of data collection.

**Number of respondents according to state**

The total of 138 teachers from 138 primary Tamil schools took part in this research. They were chosen randomly from five states in Peninsular Malaysia.

**Table 1.** Number of respondents according to state

State	No. of respondents
Selangor	94
Federal Territory	9
Negeri Sembilan	11
Johor	13
Perak	11
Total	138

**Types of school according to demographic setting**

To obtain an overview of Tamil schools, data was obtained from schools in cities, towns and rural areas. Table 2 shows the types of school which became the sampling for the research.

**Table 2.** Number of schools according to demographic setting

Demographic	Total
City school	69
Town school	19
Rural school	50
Grand total	138

**Importance Towards the Teaching of ME**

From the overall respond of the teachers, only 48 (34.8%) out of 138 schools give priority to the teaching of ME in Year 6. The other 90 Tamil primary schools (65.2%) do not place importance to the teaching of ME in Year 6. Table 3 explains the importance given for ME.

**Table 3.** Importance given by Tamil primary schools generally for the teaching and learning of ME in Year 6

School setting	Schools that do not prioritise ME (%)	School that prioritise ME (%)
City	41 (29.7)	28 (20.3)
Town	15 (10.9)	4 (2.9)
Rural area	34 (24.6)	16 (11.6)
Total	90 (65.2)	48 (34.8)

The priority given for ME can be further analysed based on the location of the school itself. Data obtained from city schools show that from 69 city schools, 41 schools (59.4%) do not prioritise the teaching and learning of ME to Year 6 students. Data obtained from 19 town schools show that 15 schools (78.9%) do not give importance to the teaching and learning of ME. The pattern does not differ much in rural areas. From the 50 schools in rural area, 34 schools (68%) do not place ME as important for their Year 6 students.

***Teachers' respond on why ME is taught in schools***

Only 48 teachers (34.8%) admitted that ME is taught in their respective schools. However, 90 (96.2%) teachers agreed that ME is an important subject to be taught. From their open response, the teachers agree that the teaching and learning of ME is very important to mould students who are moral, disciplined and appreciate moral values. They also believe that teaching ME will deliver students who are complete and useful to the nation. They share the opinion that ME helps to mould students who are well behaved and polite.

***Teachers' respond on why ME is not taught in schools***

90 teachers responded to this item and 86 teachers (95.5%) stated that ME is not taught in Year 6 because priority is given to UPSR subjects such as Malay Language, Tamil Language, English Language, Mathematics and Science. They also admitted that ME periods are used to teach UPSR subjects. Some respondents also said that ME is not an important subject and is not a core subject. Some respondents stated that the teaching of ME is not considered important because of government policy which only prioritises examination or UPSR.

**Analysis of Teachers Teaching ME**

The analysis of teachers teaching ME in the 138 Tamil primary schools show 91 teachers (65.9%) teaching ME are non ME option teachers. The ME option teachers only make up 23.9% or 33 teachers. Other than that the principal, assistant principal, class teacher and language teachers also teach ME. Table 4 provides the data that support the explanation.

**Table 4.** Type of teachers who teach ME

Teacher type	Number (%)
Principal	9 (6.5)
Assistant Principal	2 (1.5)
ME option teacher	33 (23.9)
Non ME option teacher	91 (65.9)
Class teacher	2 (1.5)
Language teacher	1 (0.7)
Total	138 (100)

## IMPLICATIONS

### Implications if ME is Taught to Year 6 Students

A total of 86 teachers provided their responses to the consequences of teaching ME to Year 6 students. 49 teachers (56.9%) said that through the teaching of ME, moral values can be instilled in students which they would use in their daily lives. Another 23 teachers (26.7%) suggested that the teaching of ME is important to mould students who are disciplined, polite and courteous. Another 6 respondents (7.0%) agreed that the teaching of ME is very important to develop a holistic individual according to JERI (*Jasmani*: physical, *Emosi*: emotions, *Rohani*: spiritual and *Intelek*: intellect).

### Implications if ME is Not Taught to Year 6 Students

A total of 92 respondents provided various opinions about the consequences of not teaching ME to Year 6 students. 78 teachers (84.8%) said if ME is not taught, the discipline problems among students would increase due to no installation of moral values. They were also of the opinion that students would be rude to their parents and teachers. More serious than that, the respondents concluded that the social problems like crimes might increase in the long run. Some respondents also felt that students would be easily influenced by negative issues as they proceed to secondary schools or in their adolescent stage.

### Teachers' Opinions to Increase the Effectiveness of Teaching and Learning of ME

The respondents provided various suggestions to increase the effectiveness of teaching and learning of ME. All 215 suggestions provided can be categorised into four big sections as shown in Table 5.

**Table 5.** Categories of suggestion to increase the effectiveness of teaching and learning of ME

Categories of suggestion	Number (%)
Management and administration of ME	88 (40.9)
Approaches and teaching technique of ME	77 (35.8)
Training and exposure to administrators and teachers of ME	42 (19.5)
ME Curriculum	7 (3.3)
Others	1 (0.5)
Total	215 (100)

From Table 5, it is obvious that teachers realise that something ought to be done to ensure that the Ministry of Education through the state education department and school administrators need to react to ensure that ME is taught as stated in the parliament documents. A total of 45 teachers (51.1%) suggested that ME becomes a core subject for UPSR. They were of the opinion that this could be the only way to salvage ME and be considered important by school administrators and taught in Year 6 Tamil schools. Twenty respondents (22.7%) suggested that ME be taught only by moral option teachers and more moral option teachers be sent to their schools. Eleven teachers (12.5%) believed that ME should be taught according to the specified timetable allocation. The subject according to them failed because of the failure in implementing the subject accordingly by the school administration. Six teachers (6.8%) suggested that the subject should be evaluated by the school inspectorates, school principal and the other officers.

As for the second category, all 77 (100%) teachers' suggestions are to increase the use of various approaches and technics in teaching and learning of ME to attract students' interests in the subject. This also shows that currently Year 6 ME teachers in Tamil vernacular schools are stereotype in teaching ME. The traditional use of 'chalk and talk' and treating the textbook as the only ME resource would bore students after sometime. Respondents of the research suggested the use of computers and internet to enhance the learning of ME other than other active learning techniques such as visits, projects, campaigns, games, role play and others.

For the third category, from the 42 suggestions of 25 teachers (59.5%), the focus is on the courses and training needed to teach ME. The respondents suggested that teachers should be exposed to latest and effective techniques of teaching and learning ME. Another 25 teachers (40.5%) suggested about the need to create awareness about the importance of teaching ME to teachers. They suggested the need to organise talks and seminars for ME teachers. They also emphasised the need for the Head of schools and the school administrators to be involved in the training too.

For the fourth category, seven teachers suggested that the content of ME should be integrated in Tamil language. They suggested that values taught in ME should also be taught in Tamil language. There were also suggestions to include religious education into the current ME syllabus.

### **Integrating Religious Elements in the Teaching and Learning of ME**

For the question on religion, 129 (93.5%) from the 138 respondents stated that religious elements should be integrated in the teaching and learning of ME. Only 9 respondents (6.5%) did not respond to this question. This shows that majority of the teachers want more religious elements to be included in the ME. This opinion clarifies the need and urgency of Tamil vernacular school teachers wanting religious component in ME. For another item, 136 responses were received and out of that 61 (44.9%) were of the opinion that more religious components should be integrated in the teaching and learning of ME because students would have knowledge and awareness of their own religion. They were also of the opinion that religious teaching provided aspects of moral values and students would have the opportunity to understand their religion deeper. Other than that, teachers felt that non-Muslim students in Tamil vernacular schools should be given the opportunity to learn their religion formally in school. The current ME syllabus first value to be learnt is “Belief in God” but values are learnt very generally without focussing specifically on any religions (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2000). Sixty respondents (44.1%) want religion aspects to be included in the ME curriculum because they are confident that religious values will mould individuals to be highly moral, courteous, polite, disciplined, have self-confidence, respect other religion, ready to face challenges, live a harmonious life and avoid social ills.

### **CONCLUSION**

This research proves that 65.2% of the Tamil vernacular schools researched do not implement the teaching and learning of ME in Year Six. Focus is specifically on subjects examined for the centralised exam (Ujian Pencapaian Sekolah Rendah, UPSR). This is a very critical situation. As we know, ME is an important core subject for the personality formation of an individual as well as holistic character development (Lickona, 1976). The findings of the research also contradict with the National Philosophy of Education which emphasises on the holistic growth of a student.

Among the main reasons why such a situation exists is the attitude of the school administrators who only focus on achievement of students in the UPSR assessed papers. ME slots in the school time table is used to teach UPSR subjects. They feel that ME is non-examinable in UPSR thus not important compared to other

UPSR assessed subjects. This situation occur maybe due to the ignorance of administrators who prioritise the excellent performance of their school in UPSR examinations. This might be reality because the performance of primary schools including Tamil vernacular schools is measured based on the UPSR results of its students. Thus, schools use all their energy, time and expertise to achieve high academic results in UPSR and life-long performance subjects such as ME is neglected.

The lack of ME option teachers is another factor why ME is not conducted effectively in Tamil vernacular schools. From the research data, only 23.9% of teachers teaching ME in Tamil vernacular schools are formally trained to teach ME. This means 76.1% of teachers teaching ME are non-Moral optionist. This may be one of the reasons why ME is not implemented fully in the Tamil vernacular schools. It is also evident in responses from the teachers who want more courses and seminars in using approaches and methods to teach ME. From the respondents' opinions, it can be concluded that teachers aren't able to differentiate between moral and religious values. Nearly all respondents want religious values to be included into the ME curriculum.

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