

# Development of School Education in Erode District from Colonial Period to Modern Era: A Historical Analysis

OPEN ACCESS

Volume: 13

Special Issue: 3

Month: March

Year: 2026

P-ISSN: 2321-788X

E-ISSN: 2582-0397

Citation:  
Vadivel, P.,  
and S. F. Naseem  
Jan. "Development of  
School Education in  
Erode District from  
Colonial Period to  
Modern Era: A  
Historical Analysis."  
*Shanlax Interantional  
Journal of Arts, Science  
and Humanities*,  
vol. 13, no. S3, 2026,  
pp. 63–68.

DOI:  
[https://doi.  
org/10.34293/sijash.  
v13iS3-Mar.10488](https://doi.org/10.34293/sijash.v13iS3-Mar.10488)

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## Abstract

*The historical evolution of school education in Erode District indicates larger changes, which took place in the sphere of South Indian education since the colonial epoch up to the modern times. Erode is a historically important area of Tamil Nadu and had gone through tremendous transformations through the colonial administrative policies, the missionary efforts along side the native reaction and the post independence governmental policies. Before the modern schools were formed, the local communities had indigenous schools like temple based schools and gurukala, which taught the classics and religious books and practical knowledge in the community. The coming of the British colonial rule in the nineteenth century came with new educational policies that encouraged western knowledge and teaching of English language. Colonial schemes like the Minute on Education of Macaulay and the Despatch of the Wood of 1854 were the basis of the organized education system in Madras Presidency that included the Erode region. Missionary organizations also did other roles in spreading education through the setting up of schools that taught literacy and modern subjects were also introduced to the education curriculum. Following the Indian independence in 1947, the Government of Tamil Nadu adopted several welfare oriented education policies such as the midday meal scheme, free textbooks, and the growth of the governmental schools and these measures have dramatically raised the number of students attending school, as well as the literacy rates in the district. The paper illustrates that the development of education was achieved as a complex process according to the colonial policy, the roles of the missionaries, social reform movements, and modern educational reforms that together changed the educational environment into a new one and led to the social and economic development of the region.*

**Keywords:** Education History, Education in Schools, Erode District, Colonial Education Policy, Missionary Education, Madras Presidency, Kongu Region, Educational Reforms.

## Introduction

Historically, education has been a relevant factor in the social, economic, and cultural progress of the societies. In India, formal education has been developing in relation to the change in the native tradition of learning due to colonial rule, missionary intervention and reforms in the post independence policies. Tamil Nadu, which has

been one of the most educationally progressive states in India, saw significant transformations in the educational setup since the nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup>

Erode district is located at the west side of the Tamil Nadu and is part of the historic Kongu Nadu region. Traditionally the region was linked with the agricultural production, the trade of the textiles and the local commerce. Under the colonial rule, the area was part of Coimbatore district of the Madras Presidency which contributed significantly to the administrative and educational development of the area.

Before the inception of western style education, the Kongu region had its own form of learning. The classical languages, religious texts, and practical arithmetic were taught in traditional educational institutions like temple schools, gurukala and community based learning institutions. These institutions had the usual temple endowments and local patrons.

With the British coming in South India in the late eighteenth century, the educational scene was transformed. Colonial governors came up with policies that attempted to promote Western education, teaching the English language and formal schools. Another area that developed under the influence of missionary societies was the establishment of learning institutions that were developed during the time.

In the twentieth century nationalist movements and social reforms initiatives also promoted the spread of education. The current research paper will look into the history of the evolution of school education in Erode District which has taken place since the colonial times to the recent period. Through the evaluation of historical documents, governmental reports, and other academic works, the study will trace the evolution of the educational institutions and pinpoint the key aspects that led to the growth of education in the region.

### **Historiography**

Historians and scholars of education have extensively studied the history of education in India. The work by S. Nurullah and J. P. Naik, which offers the overall overview of the evolution of the education in the British colonial era and elaborates on the formation of the colonial educational policy in India, is one of the most influential in this area.

The study of colonial education by Krishna Kumar focuses on the ideological and political interests of the British educational policy. Kumar states that colonial education was supposed to give rise to a group of educated Indians who could act as the link between the British administration and the native people.

The missionary organizations have also been noted by historians of South India in the expansion of education. The missionary societies started schools in many areas of Madras Presidency and presented western style curriculum with modern subjects like science, geography and English literature.

The social and political history of Tamil Nadu also suggests the connection between the growth of education and the extended social reform movements. As an illustration, the Dravidian movement advocated education as a solution to social equality and curbing caste based discrimination.

Despite extensive literature written on the history of education in India and Tamil Nadu, few have concentrated on individual district education development, with Erode being one of them. The importance of the district level historical studies is that it shows local trends of educational development and the significance of local communities in enhancing education.

### **Research Methodology**

In this study, the author addresses the historical approach to examine the history of school education in the Erode District. Historical research entails the organized gathering, assessment and explanation of historical data in a bid to re-write past events and make sense of their meaning.

The author uses mostly secondary historical records like books, government sources, census reports and district gazetteers. These sources are useful in terms of information about educational policies, institutional development, and demographic changes of the region.<sup>12</sup>

The Madras District Gazetteer, where the administrative structure, economic condition, and institutions of most of the districts were described in details, was one of the most significant historical sources of studying the regional history in colonial India, its collection, assessment of the sources reliability and interpretation of these data in the context of the chronological framework was the part of the research process. By doing this, the research will be able to recreate the history of school education in Erode District and provide the key factors that impacted the rise of education.

### **Indigenous Education in the Kongu Region**

The Kongu region had localized learning systems that were deeply connected with the local culture prior to the introduction of colonial education. These institutions were based on informal institutions like temple schools and community based learning centers.<sup>1</sup>□

Gurus or scholars were teachers who taught the classical languages, religious books and moral philosophy. Memorization, recitation and oral teaching were some of the ways through which students were trained.

Indigenous schools had a curriculum that focused on religious and cultural knowledge. The Sanskrit grammar, Tamil literature and the sacred texts were subjects of the educational system. Also students who were engaged in trade and agriculture were taught practical arithmetic and accounting, however they were not very accessible. Access to education used to be confined to specific social groups and communities, but as the colonial education appeared in the nineteenth century, most of these native schools were slowly destroyed or turned into the modern schools managed by the government or missionaries.

### **Colonial Education Policy in the Madras Presidency**

The history of the modern education development in the Erode region was directly related to the educational policy of the British occupation of the Madras Presidency. In the early nineteenth century colonial authorities started to work out the policies that could promote the western education in India.

One of the most significant shifts in the colonial educational policy was the well-known Minute on Education by Thomas Babington Macaulay in 1835. Macaulay supported the spread of English education and believed that western knowledge ought to be brought in the Indian educational system.<sup>1</sup>□

The Wood in his Despatch of 1854 was another significant landmark that provided the basis of a systematic system of education in British India. The despatch suggested the opening up of universities, teacher training schools, and government schools throughout the land. 20

These policies resulted in the opening of many education institutions in the Madras Presidency. In large towns government schools were opened, and missionary societies schools in the country. With time a system of government grant was introduced to assist the private educational institutions, bringing about expansion of educational opportunities in the Kongu region and paved the way to school education development in other countries like Erode.

### **Missionary Contributions to Education in Erode**

The missionary organizations were significant in the dissemination of education in South India in the nineteenth century. During the Madras Presidency, several Christian missionary societies used to set up schools that focused on teaching literacy and religious education.

Missionary schools brought about the structured curricula that comprised English language education, mathematics, geography, and basic sciences. These schools frequently became the first of the modern schools in country districts.

Missionaries also encouraged female education which was minimal in most of the traditional education setups. Missionary institutions also helped to increase educational awareness among local people by setting up girls school, and promoting female enrolment in schools; in some cases like in Erode and Gobichettipalayam, missionary institutions promoted the growth of educational opportunities. These schools were later developed to become significant learning institutions where students were served in large numbers.

### **Educational Expansion in the Twentieth Century**

The twentieth century recorded massive growth of learning institutions in the Erode region. The policies of the government concerning education were to give rise to the new primary and secondary schools.

Towns like the Erode town were recording some of the fastest educational progress with the schools being built to cope with the rising education demand. These schools offered students a chance to get secondary education and train to work in the government and business fields.

This was also the time when social reform movements were significant in facilitating education. Leaders of Dravidian movement believed in the power of education as the means of social equality and economic growth. Community participation was another factor that helped in development of education. The schools and colleges in various regions of the region were established with the help of local philanthropists and social organizations.

### **Post Independence Educational Reforms**

With the independence of India in 1947, the policy of education in India shifted to the increase of accessibility to schooling and decrease in illiteracy. It was the Indian Constitution that stressed the need of primary education being universal as a national objective.

In Tamil Nadu, some welfare based educational schemes were implemented to enhance the school enrolments. Among the most impactful was the midday meal scheme that motivated children who came out of the economically disadvantaged background to go to school.<sup>2</sup>□

Access to education was enhanced by the government programs like free textbooks, free uniforms and scholarships. Consequently, the schools in the rural and urban regions were built very fast and the teacher training institutions were too augmented in an effort to enhance the quality of education and the availability of well trained educators in the schools.

### **Modern Developments in School Education**

The school education within Erode District has continued to transform with changes in the technological world and policy reforms in the past decades. Government policies have been aimed in enhancing the education infrastructure, increasing the digital learning and inclusive education.

The number of private educational establishments within the district has also increased, which is indicative of the increased need in various educational opportunities and specialized education. With such developments, there are still problems in providing equal access to quality education in rural and urban regions. There is a necessity to continue policy efforts as well as community participation in order to deal with these problems.

### **Conclusion**

The historical account of school education in Erode District is paying the intricate engagements of the local customs, colonial policies, missionary activities, and post independence reforms.

Although the traditional educational institutions were in existence before the colonial rule, introduction of modern schooling in the nineteenth century saw a lot of transformation in the educational context as well as the growth of educational institutions in the twentieth century and the introduction of welfare oriented policies in the post-independence period led to the rise in literacy and access of education. Erode District today has a well developed network of schools that have still helped in social and economic development. The historical development of education in the region can give useful ideas on how the future education policies can be developed.

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