

**SPEECH BY MS LOW YEN LING
SENIOR PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY FOR THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
AT THE INSPIRING TEACHER OF ENGLISH AWARDS CEREMONY
ON TUESDAY, 8 OCTOBER 2019, 7.00 PM**

Very good evening to all teachers,

Mr Jason Leow, Chairman of Speak Good English Movement

Ms Lydia Lim, Head of Training and Talent Development, Singapore Press Holdings

Mr Wong Siew Hoong, Director-General of Education

Mrs Chua Yen Ching and Mr Sng Chern Wei, Deputy Director-Generals of Education

Ladies and gentlemen,

1. I am delighted to join you this evening to celebrate our teachers who have not only inspired a love for the English language, but also have been instrumental in developing our students' abilities in spoken and also written English.

ENGLISH IN SINGAPORE TODAY

2. As the language of governance and administration in Singapore, English plays an important role in shaping our national identity and strengthening our social fabric, especially as a multi-racial, multi-cultural society. Historically, it has also given us a competitive advantage in global business and helped us to gain access to latest developments in scientific research and technology.

3. While English unites our different races with a common language and plugs us into the world economy, our mother tongue languages – Chinese, Malay, Tamil – also anchor us to our heritage, strengthen our values, and our sense of cultural belonging. Our bilingual policy and education enables Singaporeans to enjoy the best of both worlds – from preserving our roots, our heritage, to advancing in the modern world.

4. Whenever I go for school visits, I notice that we really have a very unique education system and it is important for our children to maximise this opportunity to build a strong foundation in bilingualism. Being bilingual or even bicultural really opens up many doors and opportunities. If our children have a strong foundation in bilingualism, the world is truly their oyster. Many young Singaporeans I have met are still grateful to their language teachers for the practices that they put them through in school, because it has given them the ability to adapt and code switch in different cultural settings, as they navigate different parts of the world.

5. Many global companies have also increasingly adopted English as their official language for workplace communication. For example, German electronics giant, Siemens, has made English its official language, and Honda, which is based in Tokyo,

announced that English would become the company's working language by 2020. All of these companies have recognised the importance of English.

THE ROLE OF EL TEACHERS

6. Today, mass communication platforms such as social media and the Internet have enabled people to connect, share and communicate with a much larger audience almost instantaneously. I think teachers here will agree that since mobile devices became readily available, we are no longer reading as much as we did when we were young. Back then, we did not have that many leisurely pursuits, so reading was a way to teleport ourselves to another country, to another setting. A lot of us probably devoured books, and read up to 12 books a month. Parents, being our children's first teachers, thus have an important role to play to create an environment for our children to enjoy reading, so that they would continue to read, even as adults.

7. With the advent of technology, such as instant messaging apps and SMSes, the way we use English in our daily lives has changed. The frequent use of acronyms and slangs for quick communication has sprouted variant spellings and linguistic expressions. It is now more important than ever to ensure that our students are proficient in and able to use internationally accepted English. We need to focus on developing in our students a strong command of the English language, while helping them to enjoy the learning of the language. Teachers are central to the delivery of quality learning experiences that inspire our students to be empathetic communicators, to be discerning readers and to be creative enquirers. This is the emphasis of the revised English Language Syllabus, which will be rolled out by 2020. In the revised syllabus, students will not only be able to learn the technicalities of the language, they will also be able to acquire higher-order thinking skills and the ability to understand and express nuances in both spoken and written forms.

8. For students who only use English in the school environment – maybe the dominant language at home is their mother tongue – we must offer them adequate opportunities to build their linguistic capital in a rich language environment. This is why MOE invests heavily in English Language support programmes such as the LSP (Learning Support Programme). The programme provides early intervention to our Primary 1 and Primary 2 students to help them gain developmentally appropriate English language and literacy skills. It is crucial for us to create a strong foundation of language and communication skills in our young students, so that they can learn effectively and master other complex English-medium subjects in school. For example, a strong English foundation will help them to understand the complexities of Math and Science at the primary school level, and the Humanities and English Literature at the secondary school level.

RECOGNITION OF AWARDEES

9. This evening, we celebrate teachers who have used innovative pedagogies to inspire the love for English in their students. Some have done so by bringing real-world relevance of the English language into their classrooms to prepare students for life beyond school. Others have gone beyond the textbook, or even leveraged digital platforms to make the learning of English come alive for students. I am now going to share two examples.

10. The English Department in Montfort Junior School led by Mdm Uma Perumal has implemented a formal assessment tool in the form of a *Reader's Theatre*, which is a wonderful platform to help students build confidence. Montfort students develop their English fluency by reading aloud story scripts with very expressive voices and gestures. It can be daunting in the beginning but after some practice, students normally start to get the hang of it. The school has found this mode of assessment to be a lot more effective in meeting the needs and learning styles of their students. By combining physical movement and opportunities for collaborative learning, the learning and using of the English language has become a very joyful and meaningful experience for the students. Well done, Madam Perumal.

11. Another English teacher, Mdm Marianne Cheong from National Junior College, used articles from The Straits Times to stimulate discussions and conversations among her students about real-life issues. This helps students keep pace with current affairs, which is equally important not only for language teachers, but parents as well. I understand that Mdm Cheong's students could relate to the news stories on education and social mobility. Initially, there were some grouses, but over time, Mdm Cheong was impressed and saw how her students communicated so easily and effectively with their peers, and the high level of engagement in their learning. She could see their conviction and passion from their journal entries and writings because it reflected the time they invested in the subject. Congratulations Mdm Cheong.

CONCLUSION

12. Our teachers have done very well in bringing the teaching of English to a higher level. Let us extend our heartiest congratulations to all the nominees, award winners and their schools. We are very proud of you.

13. To all ITEA alumni, I want to encourage you to continue challenging and inspiring your peers to create new ways of teaching the English language, which will take our students to a deeper level of appreciation and mastery of this important subject. We can also leverage technological platforms, such as Student Learning Space, to foster collaborative learning. We should also continue to share best practices across schools. You are all pioneers and forerunners in this journey and your efforts will not only help to build a strong foundation for our kids but help to develop a pipeline of journalists, news readers and future English teachers.

14. On behalf of everyone in MOE HQ, allow us to express our heartfelt appreciation to the teams at Speak Good English Movement and The Straits Times for working tirelessly every year – for 12 years and more – to honour our teachers and foster a love for the English language in our students.

15. Once again, congratulations. Thank you very much and have a wonderful evening ahead.