

Minister for Education, and Minister-in-Charge of Social Services Integration,
Mr Desmond Lee's Congratulatory Speech for the
Inspiring Teacher of English Awards Ceremony 2025
Oldham Theatre, National Archives of Singapore,
1 October 2025, 1500 – 1700

A very good afternoon,

Mr Jason Leow, Chairman of the Speak Good English Movement

Mr Jaime Ho, Editor, The Straits Times

Friends of the education community and distinguished guests,

INTRODUCTION

1. It is my pleasure to join you this afternoon at the 2025 Inspiring Teacher of English Awards Ceremony. Today, we celebrate the passion and dedication of English Language educators across Singapore – especially our awardees and nominees, whose commitment has left a deep and lasting impact on the lives they touch.
2. Thank you to the Speak Good English Movement and The Straits Times for your partnership in organising these awards over the past 18 years, to recognise and honour the efforts and impact of our English Language teachers.

ROLE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN SINGAPORE

3. The English language has played important roles for Singapore.
 - a. It connects us to the world – letting us serve as a bridge between Asia and the world. It helps us to be a hub for the world's companies to base themselves here, creating good jobs for our people. It lets our workers and companies go out beyond our shores to seize opportunities. And it enables our scientists and technologists to collaborate with their international counterparts. So our English proficiency is a key part of our competitive advantage as a nation.

- b. In our society, it allows us to communicate across our multiracial and multilinguistic society, whether in our hawker centres, playgrounds, or workplaces. It has helped serve as a foundation for the diverse but cohesive society that is one of Singapore's unique strengths.
- 4. In our schools, English is also a common denominator across many of our subjects, allowing our students to learn deeply in the sciences and humanities. It provides our students with a voice to engage in conversations about the big trends and challenges we face – the rise of artificial intelligence, the impact of climate change and an ageing population, and the uncertainty of the evolving international order.

IMPORTANCE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS

- 5. So our English teachers play a key role:
 - a. To give voice to our students, by helping them articulate their thoughts clearly,
 - b. And building their capacity to navigate an increasingly complex world, by teaching them to construct nuanced arguments and understand complex texts.
- 6. Thank you to all our English teachers for your hard work to educate our students. And in particular, today we recognise and celebrate the work of our award winners and nominees.
- 7. Our award winners are eight English teachers who have inspired their students and fellow teachers, and serve as role models of our education fraternity. Let me share three of their stories.

8. First, Ms Amirinazeb D/O Aurangzeb, a teacher at CHIJ Kellock, teaches her students how to engage with AI critically.
 - a. Amirinazeb incorporates the use of a chatbot during writing lessons, enabling her students to evaluate suggestions and make informed decisions when interacting with AI feedback, in a collaborative manner. She role-models how to critically evaluate AI feedback by demonstrating how to question its accuracy and relevance.
9. Second, Mr Clifton Tay Xiang Rui, a General Paper tutor at Anderson Serangoon Junior College, makes use of games and simulations to help students understand complex global issues – not just as distant theories but as realities they can influence.
 - a. For instance, Clifton conceived and conducted a dilemma game to introduce the concept of cooperation versus conflict in international relations. To cement his students' knowledge, he identifies relevant articles that helped students understand how these concepts mirror and manifest in real-life situations.
10. And third, Mr Perdana Putra Pan, Subject Head of English Language from Queenstown Secondary School. A Leadership Award recipient, he demonstrates how leadership can multiply impact.
 - a. Perdana is building a community of practice that benefits students beyond his own school – by organising regular professional learning initiatives for his Literature colleagues to foster collaborative curriculum development, and leading a book club for Literature teachers in the cluster.

TEACHING ENGLISH AS TECHNOLOGY EVOLVES

11. Such inspiring stories demonstrate how our teachers are essential in guiding our children as the world continues to change.

12. For example, with artificial intelligence (AI), students can now write essays, translate languages, and even compose poetry with just ChatGPT and a prompt.

a. But to use AI well, our students need to learn to use it as a tool, not a crutch. They need to develop human competencies: critical and adaptive thinking, cross-cultural literacy, and communication and collaboration skills. These will allow our students to critique AI output and add human value to their work.

b. And as our award winners show, our teachers bring a human touch to teaching these competencies, that AI cannot replicate.

13. As English Language teachers, you play an important role in this. You do not simply teach vocabulary and grammar so that students can consume and process information. You teach students to question it critically, distinguishing between facts and opinions, between authentic voices and artificial ones. In an age of information overload, you teach discernment.

14. You also role-model how to make good use of technology, such as through our Student Learning Space's Annotated Feedback Assistant. This assistant provides students with instant feedback on writing: helping them identify errors, understand their mistakes, and improve their language skills. However, it is teachers who make it powerful, by using it to teach students how to engage with the feedback thoughtfully, recognise their own gaps, and address these in future writing.

CONCLUSION

15. So to all award recipients and nominees, congratulations and thank you for your dedication. Whether you are receiving an award or have been nominated, your work has made a difference to our students: igniting their love for the English language, nurturing confident communicators, and simply finding their own voice.

16. As we look to the future, let us all continue these important efforts:

- a. To develop our students to their fullest potential, as critical thinkers and authentic communicators,
- b. And to support fellow educators, by sharing your experiences, tips and tricks, and collective wisdom generously, so that they in turn can mould our students well.

17. Thank you.