

**SPEECH BY DR MOHAMAD MALIKI BIN OSMAN
SECOND MINISTER FOR EDUCATION
AT THE INSPIRING TEACHER OF ENGLISH AWARDS CEREMONY
ON THURSDAY, 7 OCTOBER 2021**

A very good afternoon,

Mr Jason Leow, Chairman of the Speak Good English Movement

Mr Wong Siew Hoong, Director-General of Education, Ministry of Education

Ms Lydia Lim, Head of Schools Department, Singapore Press Holdings

All our educators,

Ladies and gentlemen,

INTRODUCTION

1. I am delighted to join you this afternoon for the Inspiring Teacher of English Award celebrations. Although held virtually, the ceremony is no less significant as we gather to recognise our teachers who have been instrumental in igniting our students' love for, and developing their abilities in the English language.

ENGLISH IN THE WORLD TODAY

2. Whether it be in economics and trade, science and technology or in the digital realm, the English language is the *lingua franca* of the world. The fastest-spreading language in human history, English is spoken at a functional level by some 1.75 billion people worldwide.

3. For example, English is the dominant language of the internet. This makes it a highly influential language because of its ability to connect people and spread ideas from all over the world.

4. The role of English in the early development of modern technology has also cemented its global importance today. From how to code to how we type, many of the world's biggest advancements were developed with the English-speaking world in mind. In Science, the majority of research papers today are published in English, which means that scientists who want to produce influential, globally recognised work will need to consider publishing in English.

ENGLISH IN SINGAPORE

5. Closer to home, the role of English cannot be understated. Our fluency in the English language gives us an edge in the global competition for talent and capital, and in connecting with the world.

6. English also plays a critical social role in Singapore as a common language to facilitate communication and understanding, and to foster strong cohesion in Singapore. In our multiracial society, English is key to helping us bond with diverse groups and widens our common space, even as we continue to treasure our Mother Tongue Languages.

THE EVOLUTION OF ENGLISH IN A DIGITAL AGE

7. Given its prevalence in many societies and settings, the English language is open to influences which enables it to evolve. The rise of the internet and the digital age has had a tremendous influence on its use. For example, popular social media platforms like Twitter, Tiktok and Instagram have developed their own rapid, bite-sized lingo. Sometimes, I end up “SMH” when “IDK” what people are saying anymore! When translated to standard English, that means, “shaking my head” (SMH) when “I don’t know” (IDK) what people are saying anymore. And of concern is when they spell don’t as “dun” and know as “noe”!

8. Many of our students are active on social media and comfortable communicating using textspeak, the kind of language that often contains short forms of words. Such textspeak has its uses in a more informal setting. But it is important to help our students learn when to switch between an informal register and a formal one, as is the appropriate use of vocabulary and expressions that reflect a consideration of purpose, audience and context. A related challenge is the economies of words in social media platforms which forces one to be able to express views with very few words which can easily compromise intent and context. Nonetheless, we should continue to harness the best of technology to provide valuable opportunities for students to use the English language in a variety of settings, and as teachable moments.

HELPING OUR STUDENTS TO LEARN ENGLISH WELL

9. Therefore, it is imperative to help our students learn the language well. We help them to build a strong foundation in English language and literacy so that they can access other learning.

10. Having a proficient command of the English language not just enables our students to access, but also process and evaluate information in a more discerning way. Our students are increasingly exposed to different media sources, not all of which may be credible or well-intentioned. Thus, critical reading skills imparted through English language lessons become even more important to help our students to distinguish fact

from opinion, to evaluate evidence, to draw logical and reasoned conclusions, and to apply and adapt ideas into other contexts.

11. Proficiency in the language also allows students to develop the vocabulary to express their ideas with sensitivity and tact, as they consider the ideas of others in a respectful and fair-minded way. The effective use of the English language creates opportunities for open conversations and encourages greater empathy and care in our classrooms and community - helping to shape Singapore into an even more gracious and cohesive society.

THE ROLE OF ENGLISH TEACHERS & RECOGNITION OF AWARDEES

12. Today, we celebrate seven teachers who exemplify what it means to be an inspiring teacher of English. Not only do they role-model the effective use of English every day, they create environments which are conducive for the practice and use of standard English in real-world contexts. They employ innovative pedagogies to help our students develop the skills to read with discernment, communicate with empathy, articulate with clarity, and deliver with confidence. Through their own passion for English, they inspire a similar love for the language in the next generation.

13. Let me share a few examples.

14. First, Miss Charissa Chern, a primary school teacher from CHIJ Our Lady of the Nativity. She incorporates dramatisation into her lessons. This allows her students to walk in the shoes of the varied characters they play. Through learning to see beyond their own perspectives, the students develop empathy for others. So for them, the English language becomes more than a medium for communication, but also a way to connect meaningfully and respectfully with others.

15. Mr Brian Lim, a secondary school teacher from Bukit Panjang Government High School, strives to make the learning of English refreshing and relevant to students by drawing references to current affairs and pop culture. He goes beyond just books, and uses multi-modal materials to enrich his lessons. By expanding his students' reading diets and getting them to share their ideas with one another, Brian nurtures their creativity and develops their love for writing.

16. Third, Ms Vikneswari Sukumaran, Level Head of English Language at Yuhua Primary School. She has been leading a team of teachers to plan and enact a school-wide structured reading programme. She believes that her students, regardless of backgrounds, should have access to good reading materials. Neither are they too young to learn about the world, and to be critical thinkers and discerning readers. Vikneswari and her team integrate current affairs into the school's English Language instructional programme. Students are provided with opportunities to read, guided to analyse information, and engage in meaningful discussions.

CONCLUSION

17. Ladies and gentlemen, in closing, let us extend our heartiest congratulations once again to all the nominees, award recipients and your schools! We are very proud of you.

18. As award recipients, you will now be part of the ITEA alumni, who play an important role in inspiring the use of standard English by students, the teaching fraternity, your peers, and the wider community. Despite the challenges that COVID-19 has brought, the pandemic has also presented new teaching and learning opportunities. I encourage you to continue to explore different innovative methods, and leverage both physical and digital spaces to nurture our students to not just be excellent, but also ethical and edifying communicators and users of English.

19. Finally, on behalf of all in MOE HQ, I would also like to thank the Speak Good English Movement, and The Straits Times for their commitment to the ITEA for the last fourteen years. Your support complements the efforts of our teachers in fostering a love for the English language in our students.

20. Thank you very much.