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Getting youth all a-Twitter over speaking good English

Online social media platforms will spread the message

■ BY CHIA YAN MIN

THIS year's Speak Good English Movement will reach out to young people by engaging them on their own turf – social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter and blogs.

The drive will also carry the key message that good communication skills go beyond using correct grammar and vocabulary.

Its tagline this year: "Impress. Inspire. Intoxicate."

The chairman of the movement, Mr Goh Eck Kheng, said young people are the target group this year because many of them are not too motivated to improve their English.

"They think that they can get by on poor English as long as they are understood by their peers."

This sentiment was uncovered in a survey the movement did a year ago. Of the 1,243 Singaporeans aged 15 to 39 polled, four in 10 – notably those in their late 20s – saw no need to speak proper English.

Nearly half of those aged 25 to 29 said they felt their command of English was already up to scratch, and that there was no need to improve it.

As part of the movement's initiative to reach out to young people, a drama series called Six Lives, which follows six friends as they learn about the importance of good communication while planning an event, will play out online.

Mr Ng Koon Seng, the deputy director of Temasek Polytechnic's Informatics & IT School, said the campaign organiser's move to use online videos and social networking sites for its message would certainly help engage young people in an environment they are thoroughly familiar with.

"These technologies also make access to rich and relevant materials easier for the masses," he added.

Mr Goh explained that the messages of the campaign are relevant to everyone, not just the young. "We have opportunities to impress, inspire and intoxicate with the English language every day, in many common situations," he said.

Online programmes aside, the movement has roped in the British Council to run a series of free English workshops in Woodlands Regional Library in October; an Inspiring Teacher of English Award, co-organised by The Straits Times and the Ministry of Education, will honour outstanding teachers of the language in the schools.

And local radio station 938LIVE will air a weekly series for executives, businessmen and managers on how to inspire their teams through communication.

The programme comes out of last year's survey finding that Singaporeans perceive authority figures as better speakers of English, and also use better English when communicating with them.

The Speak Good English Movement, launched in 2000, has had its last two runs led by Mr Goh, a book publisher.

He said that although the drive has raised awareness, a lot can still be done to raise the standard of English here.

"We hope the movement will go beyond the institutional, so that each Singaporean can be a partner in it and help those weaker in English to improve," he said.

More information can be found at www.goodenglish.org.sg.
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SPEAK GOOD ENGLISH MOVEMENT **IMPRESS INSPIRE INTOXICATE**