

Headline	Women help women bridge barrier to English		
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Description	The Women Learning English (WISH) Programme is an adult literacy programme run by Society for Reading and Literacy (SRL). This programme aims to help women pick up basic reading and writing skills and has lesson conducted at various libraries and community centres.		



LESSON: (From left) Madam Tan guides Madam Tee, Madam Lee and Madam Tan to read a book on Chinese culture.

Women help women bridge barrier to English

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SHE was a Mandarin teacher in a primary school for 40 years.

Decades later, the roles are reversed.

Now retired, Madam Tan Peck Hua, 70, is the oldest student in her English reading class at Queenstown Library.

Along with 12 classmates – mostly retirees and housewives over 40 – Madam Tan eagerly practises her speech by reading stories and song lyrics picked out by her teacher, Madam Tan Siew Lum, 55.

Madam Tan has progressed from first picking up basic language skills over a two-year weekly course, to ongoing fortnightly reading lessons, both under the Women Learning English (WISH) programme.

The programme, which kicked off in 1984, has helped about 600 students every year hone their English language skills.

The adult literacy programme is run by the Society for Reading and Literacy (SRL) under the Speak Good English Movement, and has lessons held at various libraries and community centres here.

Basic reading & writing

Run by 18 volunteers, the programme sees women helping other women pick up basic reading and writing skills.

The Government's emphasis on speaking good English today is evident. The Ministry of Education announced recently that it will set up an English Language Task Force to improve the standard of English in schools.

Madam Tan said she didn't do well in English when she was in school. Her years as a Mandarin teacher also didn't help her improve her English skills.

But since enrolling in the WISH programme in 2003, Madam Tan can now read, write and string together simple sentences.

Madam Tan was not the only one in the class who did not have the chance to pick up English in her younger days.

Part-time cleaner Tee Poh Eng, 66, who studied up to Primary 6, was enrolled in a Chinese school where she didn't get any opportunity to pick up the language.

She was so eager to learn that she invested \$550 in an audio cassette guide – a considerable sum 30 years ago. But the repetitive drone of the audio lessons soon put her to sleep, she said with a laugh.

In 2003, she found out about the WISH programme through her children and signed up.

Having picked up English has helped improve her relationship with her Malay and Indian colleagues. It has also helped bridge the gap between her and her older grandson, 4.

Those who wish to volunteer or enrol with the programme can e-mail wish@srl.org.sg