

<b>Headline</b>	Raise standard of English: Ng Eng Hen		
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<b>Description</b>	Education Minister stresses the importance and need to speak better English. To raise the standard of English, the English Language Institute of Singapore (ELIS) will pool resources at national level and could eventually cater to teachers in other countries.		

## Raise standard of English: Ng Eng Hen

A language institute will pool resources at national level, could eventually cater to teachers in other countries



by Neo Chai Chin

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IT HAS been a long-standing issue punctuated by periodic media reports of bad English usage and the Speak Good English Movement's efforts. Yesterday, Education Minister Ng Eng Hen issued the challenge to all teachers for the year ahead: Raise the standard of English.

In his keynote address at the Ministry of Education Work Plan Seminar, the most important speech in the annual education calendar, Dr Ng not only stressed the need to speak better English, he said Singapore can aim to be an English teaching hub for Asia.

Language ability is "an important skill that we must cultivate in our students for this globalised world", where those able to communicate their ideas and convince others will have a competitive edge, he said.

"While most teachers are proud of our standards in, say, Maths and Science, we are less enamoured of our standard of English. This is a sensitive subject and I'm not raising it to demoralise teachers and students, but to signal that we should begin concerted efforts to raise the standard of English."

One of the building blocks for teachers will be an English Language Institute of Singapore - a recommendation of the English Language Task Force, itself newly set up by MOE in June, with Senior Minister of State (Education) S Iswaran as adviser and director-general of education, Ms Ho Peng, as its head.

Dr Ng said the institute will pool resources at the national level and could eventually cater to English language teachers "in the region and beyond".

Progress is starting to show, with programmes such as Strategies for English Language Learning and Reading (Stellar) introduced to all Primary One classes this year and to be phased in at all levels by 2014. It aims to develop better speakers through the use of show-and-tell, role-play and dramatisation,



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Students at Ngee Ann Secondary are able to use info-comm technology and new media platforms to enhance their learning. ERNEST CHUA

and schools attest that Stellar students speak with more confidence.

Grammar is also taught more explicitly now, said Ms Jeyalaxmy Ayadurai, a teacher of 29 years who guides a cluster of schools in Literature-driven English programmes. Through exposure to books such as *Sing To The Dawn*, she sees Secondary One Express students' writing "getting more descriptive, with less paucity of ideas when they write".

Another boost will come next year: A new English Language curriculum for Primary One and Two students, as well as at the Secondary One Express and Normal (Academic) levels. It will focus on developing oral confidence, grammar knowledge and a love for reading, said an MOE spokesperson.

For more senior students, a new subject called English Language and Linguistics was launched at six junior colleges and schools this year.

But Singapore's bilingual policy has served it well, and curriculum time for mother tongue languages will not be cut, assured Dr Ng.

In a landscape where the proportion of Primary One students from English-speaking households has spiked in the last 25 years, however, getting students to use and appreciate their mother tongues should garner as much emphasis as test results, he said.

Today, English is the dominant home language for the majority of Primary One pupils - and in Malay households, the figure has grown from 27.7 per cent in 2005 to 35 per cent.

"We need to face these challenges for mother tongue languages squarely," said Dr Ng, who advocated the use of innovative approaches such as podcasts.

"If our students are put off by their mother tongue languages when they leave schools, then I think we have failed in our efforts."