The Star

Emphasis on English

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English to the fore: Fadhlina giving her speech at the prize-giving ceremony.

Fadhlina: But BM equally important

Having a strong command of the English language is a critical asset, whether to access knowledge, pursue higher education, or thrive in the competitive workplace, said Education Minister Fadhlina Sidek.

“English is not just a subject to be studied, but a valuable tool that opens doors to a world of possibilities.

“That is why we are firmly committed to equipping our students with this vital skill so that they can navigate the challenges of the 21st century with confidence, competence and success,” she said at the ELS English Language Ambassador Award prize-giving ceremony in Kuala Lumpur on May 9.

During the event, Fadhlina also stressed that Bahasa Malaysia (BM) must be upheld even as we strengthen English as a second language.

“Meeting future demands requires us to be proficient in both BM and English.

“It is crucial now to look at the Upholding the Malay Language and Strengthening the English Language (MBMMBI) agenda to prevent marginalisation,” she said, adding that competitions and activities such as the ELS English Language Ambassador Award are an essential part of the ministry’s strategy to emphasise the importance of English proficiency, which is also in line with the ministry’s agenda to bolster the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) curriculum, advance digital education, strengthen technical and vocational education and training (TVET) programmes, and refine the school curriculum, early childhood education, as well as the MBMMBI initiative.

“I am truly heartened and inspired to see that more private sector organisations like ELS are coming forward to partner with us in these vital efforts, recognising the immense potential of our young people and the importance of nurturing their linguistic abilities,” she said.

Held annually with the support of the ministry, the ceremony honoured the top 10 winners of the essay writing competition, which saw the participation of 30,987 Forms Four and Five students from 516 schools nationwide.

The competition also included an online English language writing programme that prepared students for their Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) English exams.

In 2022, ELS introduced the competition as part of its corporate social responsibility efforts to contribute to the government’s drive for enhanced English language proficiency among secondary school students.

A strong command of English is essential for students to thrive in an increasingly globalised world, said ELS board of governors chair Puan Sri Aisha Shamsuddin, adding that the ELS English Language Ambassador Award aimed to inspire and empower students to become confident communicators.

Expressing her excitement, the competition’s grand champion Nur Maisara Ahmad Joha said she was thrilled at the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to visit Australia, a country she has never been to before.

The SMK Dato' Sheikh Ahmad, Perlis, student was awarded a one-week study tour to the University of Adelaide, inclusive of return flight tickets and accommodation, and a cash award of RM2,000.

She also took home a trophy, a certificate of achievement, and a one-year subscription to the JustRead online programme and Digital English Skills Grammar and Vocabulary.

"Winning this competition was both shocking and exciting. I'm over the moon.

"I'll video call my parents from Adelaide. I was at boarding school when I got the call about my win. My parents are very proud of me for winning the award," said Nur Maisara, whose parents are soldiers in the Malaysian army.

She shared that she aspires to study language and become a lecturer to help others appreciate the beauty of language.

"My obsession with J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter series as a child sparked my interest in writing. I wanted to create stories that people would enjoy just as much," she said.

Her winning essay, entitled "Young and Beautiful", is about a woman who becomes overly materialistic and fears ageing. As she grows older, she becomes frantic before finally understanding the true meaning of life.

"True beauty means being authentic to your inner self, not just focusing on what's on the surface," Nur Maisara said.

She will be joining the University of Adelaide's orientation week in July, experiencing studying abroad through social events, cultural programmes and excursions around the city of Adelaide.