The Star

RAISING THE BAR ON ENGLISH LITERACY

Sunday, 18 Aug 2024



Students taking part in an MFS workshop.

New plan to better language proficiency among Malaysian students and teachers

STEPS are underway to improve English language literacy among students and teachers.

This is in response to the Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's call earlier this year to increase English proficiency among teachers and students in addition to holistically improving the quality of English education in schools.

The ministry has, in fact, been actively working towards improving the command of English among the nation's students and teachers since 2016 through the English Language Roadmap 2015-2025 and Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025.

Its deputy director-general (school operations) Zainal Abas (pic) said the Education Ministry's latest English Language Education Enhancement Plan (3PBI) complements the roadmap and blueprint, and is an initiative under the Upholding Malay Language and Strengthening Command of English (MBMBMI) policy.



“The ministry aims to strengthen the delivery of English language education through the 3PBI initiatives and to foster an ELT education system that emphasises on the growth of human values, discipline and a knowledgeable generation.

“3PBI also seeks to improve the quality of English teachers by offering courses focused on English language development and specialised skills,” he said in an interview in Putrajaya on Aug 13.

At the same time, the plan emphasises embracing the ability to use technologies, in teaching and learning as well as enhancing resources for English language instruction.The plan also supports three of the ministry’s cores of excellence - emphasising human dignity through the formation of manners, morals and integrity (Thrust Two); addressing the issue of students dropping out from the education system as well as literacy and numeracy problems, and bridging the educational gap (Thrust Four); and improving digital education in schools (Thrust Seven).

Zainal said there are five objectives for the plan including improving student excellence in English through strengthening oral communication and high-level reading skills.

“First, we want to further strengthen the mastery of the English language among students, especially those who do not meet the minimum proficiency level,” he said.

The ministry also aims to improve the quality of English Language teachers through professional development courses and specialised skills courses (specialist certificate).

“We also want to boost the integration of technology in teaching and learning for English subjects as well as develop resources for teaching and learning English,” he said, adding that many resources are available through the ministry’s Digital Educational Learning Initiative Malaysia (Delima) application.

Comprehensive initiatives

Zainal said the ministry has implemented several English language programmes targeting students and teachers in order to achieve the aims of the plan both in and out of the classroom.

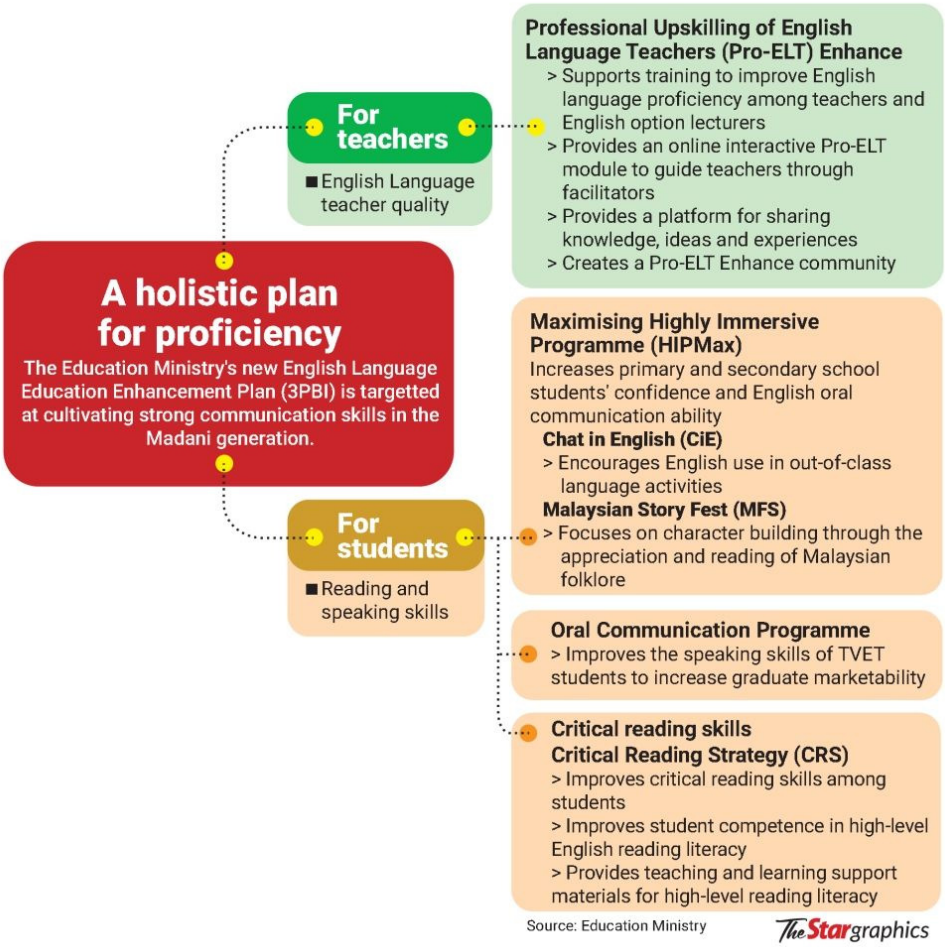
These are the Maximising Highly Immersive Programme (HIPMax): Chat in English (CiE) and Malaysian Story Fest (MFS) designed to enhance English oral skills - reading and speaking - among primary and secondary school students, and the Critical Reading Strategy (CRS).

For post-secondary students, namely technical, vocational education and training (TVET) students, there is the Oral Communication (OC) Programme.

“HIPMax is an extension of the HIP programme that has been implemented in all schools under the ministry since 2016,” he said, adding that it aims to boost students’ confidence and proficiency in oral communication through two main activities - the CiE and MFS.

Through HIPMax, Zainal said teachers and even canteen staff can become part of the “immersive environment” by communicating with students in English during school-wide events such as an English Day or English Week.

“Learning English is not just confined to the classroom. Students need to practice,” he said.Parents can also play a role through the Parent-Teacher Association, he added.



CiE are out-of-class activities designed to immerse students in English language use where all primary and secondary school students can participate in various activities within a supportive language learning environment.

Schools are given a starter kit of oral skills activities with diverse oral activities tailored to different skill levels. Monthly, for about a week, students carry out the activities in a relaxed atmosphere with their teachers' support.

Meanwhile, the MFS focuses on character building by having students read and appreciate local folklore. The story fest is held annually in selected primary and secondary schools under the ministry, said Zainal.

The event encompasses 16 hours of online workshops and face-to-face sessions, before culminating in a storytelling competition and a performance.

“All these activities are also about character building to build their confidence and to collaborate by working with one another,” he said.

To foster high level reading skills, the ministry has also developed a comprehensive English reading programme for preschools through the CRS.

The CRS currently targets Form Three students from the 2024/2025 academic year but plans are underway to expand the strategy to include all secondary students as well as those in preschools, primary schools, as well as pre-service and in-service teachers.

The OC programme, Zainal explained, provides a learning module for the mastery of English communication skills and is a support module to the English language curriculum framework used in vocational colleges.

It also uses technology, such as gamification, to perform oral activities, which helps students practice and refine their speaking skills in an interactive manner.

Then there is the Professional Upskilling of English Language Teachers (Pro-ELT) Enhance meant for teachers and English option lecturers.

This programme complements the ministry’s Pro-ELT programme by offering teachers and English language option lecturers specialised training to improve their command and fluency of the language.

Teachers are also trained to provide intervention for language remediation, with 4,500 of them trained so far in HIP Remedial Instruction (HIP RI).

The intervention is carried out in the English teaching and learning process to ensure that students achieve the fluency level targetted in the curriculum. These teachers will then go on to train their peers.

“If we want to improve our students, we need to improve the teachers first.

“If teachers are weak, how can they help their charges become better?” he asked.Zainal added that all stakeholders, especially school heads and parents, need to be committed and to play their part if the ministry’s holistic plan is to succeed.

“The ministry is confident that the 3PBI will effectively support and strengthen English language education reform efforts,” he concluded.