The Star

Engaging students beyond textbooks

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Training in session: Abdul Said and Anna (both holding Star-NiE tote bags) posing for a group photo with the teachers. — CHAN BOON KAI/The Star

A WHOLE new experience of English language learning awaits students with the use of newspapers in the classroom.

SMJK Jit Sin teacher Low Su Chin said this approach would best benefit students in the lower forms, whose lessons are less bound by textbooks.

“Since those in the lower forms have non-textbook lessons, we can incorporate the use of newspapers as another resource for them.

“Newspapers contain illustrations and writings that they do not normally encounter through textbooks.

“It helps the students engage better in learning, especially those who are shy to speak before an audience,” the 35-year-old said during The Star’s Newspaper-in-Education (Star-NiE) workshop at the Penang State Education Department (JPN) Resources and Educational Technology Centre in Pokok Sena on May 21.

Low was among 30 teachers from various schools in the area who learnt the many ways and benefits of teaching and learning using newspapers through the workshop conducted by Star-NiE freelance trainer Anna Cherubin.

SMK Mengkuang teacher Maisarrah Mohd Aljefferi said sections of the newspaper would cater to different students in her school.

“The usual difficulty faced by students is reading, and the content in newspapers, which varies in topics and difficulty, would suit them at different levels.

“I’ve not used the newspaper to teach but can now see its potential,” said the 26-year-old.

JPN Penang school improvement specialist coach Roger Edward Vathamoney said he had used newspapers to teach Form Six students with positive results.

“I have spent 30 years in teaching and back in the early years, I would ensure that students bought a copy of the newspaper on Mondays. I would assign them to read the news, digest it, then summarise and present its content in class.

“It improves their comprehension and public speaking skills.

“We need to bring back this culture of reading from hardcopy materials as there is a lot to learn from newspapers, from picking up new words to obtaining new ideas to write in essays,” the 52-year-old said.

He added that more workshops need to be conducted to expose the new generation of teachers who may not be familiar with using newspapers.

“Newspapers can serve as another platform for fun learning and reduce dependency on following a strict syllabus in the early stages of education.

“Once students master their vocabulary, they can excel in their schooling and education in later stages,” he said.

Epic Learning Consultancy founder and chief learning facilitator Valentino Lee, 55, who was a speaker at the session, said newspapers could change how lessons are taught.

“Teachers may conduct lessons in many ways but distractions can sway the attention of students if the lessons are not interesting enough.

“One way to engage with students is through newspapers, but such practice needs to start with the teachers.

“Only when students pay attention and show interest in learning can they acquire knowledge,” he said.

JPN Penang director Abdul Said Hussain encouraged teachers to continue their efforts in the process of learning and teaching.

“This is a continuous effort and teachers are always busy carrying out the duties they have been entrusted with.

“I urge them to focus and be the best in whatever they do.

“The Star-NiE programme has long been around and I hope students continue to benefit from it,” he said.

Since its inception in 1997, Star-NiE has supported English language teaching and learning in primary and secondary schools nationwide.