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Headline: **Raising English standards**  
 Publication : **The Sun, Malaysia**  
 Section : **-**  
 Page : **19**  
 Date : **1 May 2012**

# Raising English standards

> GAB Foundation's programme builds students' interest in the language

It was a proud moment for Choo Hong Foo as he watched his students recite a popular English nursery rhyme in front of a large crowd with great confidence and enthusiasm. It was a rare sight for the headmaster of SJK(C) Chung Sin to see his students perform in English, especially when they were reluctant to even converse in the language just a few months ago.

The students, aged 8, were part of the graduating class who put up a performance during GAB Foundation's English Programme graduation ceremony.

Aimed at enhancing English proficiency level among lower primary students, the programme saw students attending supplementary English classes during the school holidays last November. More than 100 students from three Chinese schools in Tanjung Malim, Perak participated in the programme.

The schools were SJK(C) Chung Sin, SJK(C) Phin Min and SJK(C) Behrang Ulu.

Commenting on the students' completion of the programme, Choo said that GAB Foundation's English Programme came at the right time as he

believes that mastering the language at an early age is one of the keys to success.

After two weeks of learning English, students are now more eager to use the language but they were not the only ones seeing the benefits. Parents of the students also saw the improvements and were delighted that their children had access to such a programme. One such parent is Thong Weng Sun who is also the head of the Parents-Teachers Association of SJK(C) Behrang Ulu. He revealed that the programme had given his daughter new opportunities to express herself in English and through the increased usage, her confidence level also increased dramatically. Today, his daughter, Thong Li Xin, actively practises her language skills by using English when communicating at home, a stark contrast

to the past where she would only speak Mandarin.

Liew Chee Jian, a facilitator for the programme, pointed out that while there are many supplementary English classes available today, GAB Foundation's programme works



The English classes, held for two weeks during the school holidays, were facilitated by volunteers from Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman (in red). Renuka officiated the Graduation Ceremony for the students who have completed the course. Also at the ceremony were the headmasters from the schools, Ong Yock Kin of SJK(C) Phin Min (4th from left), Choo Hong Foo of SJK(C) Chung Sin (6th from left) and Liew Seet Heong of SJK(C) Behrang Ulu (3rd from right).

because the curriculum focuses on application rather than rote learning.

"During the course, students are encouraged to use English through storytelling, singing and learning rhymes. They were also asked to express themselves in English through arts and crafts which they thoroughly enjoyed. By being more practical and fun, the children are more comfortable and confident which encourages them to communicate more," commented Liew, an undergraduate from Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman (UTAR) who underwent a 3-day training course to ensure that he is well-equipped to coach the students.

To cultivate students' interest for the language, comprehensive lesson plans were specially designed to promote the fun element in learning and using English. By adding a dimension of fun to the lessons, children are more comfortable expressing themselves in a relaxed and open environment.

GAB Foundation's English Programme which began in 2008 has had more than 500 graduates to date. The programme which

started in just five Tamil schools has now been extended to three Chinese schools.

GAB Foundation director Renuka Indrarajah highlights, "After three years of running this programme, we have seen countless students benefiting from the supplementary lessons.

We also believe that we have been successful because our programme is really about getting the students comfortable in the English language in a fun and educational way. We are still in the process of refining the programme further so that we can further maximise the benefits and explore other ways to assist schools in raising English standards."

As part of their efforts to promote English, GAB Foundation also donates reading corners to schools and learning centres to encourage students to nurture the reading habit by giving them access to English reading materials. The reading corners, which feature custom-built furniture to create a conducive reading experience, have benefitted over 5,000 students across Malaysia, including the indigenous communities in Sabah and Sarawak.