NTU develops Chinese teaching materials for preschools based on local scenes and Singaporean life

Learning Chinese, the local way

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Pictures of HDB living and MRT travel, as well as desktop games by local students, are part of new materials developed to teach pre-schoolers Chinese.

The materials, designed by the Confucius Institute at the Nanyang Technological University (CI-NTU) for children from ages three to six, feature content that is locally relevant.

It is also in line with the Ministry of Education’s Nurturing Early Learners framework, which spells out the learning outcomes of pre-school education.

The resources, titled Chinese for Early Learners, was launched yesterday by Minister for Education (Higher Education and Skills) Ong Ye Kung.

He commended the institute’s effort, telling reporters that learning any language has to be a ground-up initiative.

The package is available for sale at $1,800 for pre-school operators. It comprises 68 books, 544 lesson plans, 2,800 flashcards and 16 student activity books.

Since 2015, CI-NTU’s teaching resource team has worked with academics and pre-school educators to develop lesson plans, book content and nursery rhymes. The project received $300,000 in seed funding from NTU in 2016, and was completed in October.

The resource package includes five online language games designed by 12 Institute of Technical Education students during their internship with the Confucius Institute, the first Chinese language and culture school in Singapore co-sponsored by China’s central government.


At the launch event at PCF Sparkletots preschool in Yishun Avenue 6, Dr Neo Peng Fu, director of CI-NTU, said there could be vast differences in learning experiences across pre-schools, especially for mother tongue classes.

“We set out to develop a localised Chinese curriculum for pre-schoolers as materials used by some pre-schools are sourced from other countries, or may not be of high quality. Our newly developed curriculum would also be helpful to pre-school operators that may not have the resources to design their own curriculum,” he said.

The materials were developed with the objective of laying a solid foundation in listening and speaking Mandarin, he said, adding that it is not children’s dominant language these days.

The books, which revolve around 17 themes such as colours and numbers, are illustrated by local comic artist Wei Tian Beng. They are also compatible with pen devices that can read the text aloud — recorded by five Singaporean children — when pressed against the words on a page.

Madam Ng Lay Tin, executive principal of PCF headquarters, said the school is in discussions to use the new materials. She added that they could supplement PCF’s current Chinese syllabus — which is developed together with the English syllabus — but would not replace it entirely.

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