Push for trilingual students: Language boon or barrier?

Incentives for students to pick up Malay were introduced at the National Day Rally. Will the move go down well?

Three's a crowd for average Joe

IF SINGAPOREANS are already struggling to be effectively bilingual, how feasible will it be for us to be trilingual?

Young people who dislike their mother tongue may probably be uninterested in their Asian heritage. Forcing them to pick up another Asian tongue will be counter-productive.

Moreover, if the third language is optional, how many of us will actually take up the offer?

Only top students qualify for the special programmes. The average Joe who struggles academically will be unable to join even if he has linguistic potential.

Unless those in the programme are truly interested, they will probably use the language only during lessons. There will not be enough practice.

Owen Yeo, 19, has a place to read social sciences at the Singapore Management University

Lessons go beyond the classroom

I HAVE learnt three lessons from 12 years of Chinese classes.

First, the Chinese phrase for teacher – lao shi – when mispronounced, can result in calling your teacher a rat. Detention then beckons.

Second, I thought I was inept at languages. This lesson, however, proved instead to be an oversight, which would not have been discovered if not for Italy's World Cup victory last year and my overwhelming love for pasta.

Nothing prepared me for the revelation that I had found something that was more than a hobby. Italian is not the only language I have picked up since; Japanese and French have followed.

While I would not go as far as to discuss foreign policy in Italian, one thing is for sure – I'm enjoying my language lessons far more than I ever did Chinese lessons.

So here is Lesson Three: Don't allow mandatory requirements or incentives to deflect your interest. Who knows how many doors you will be closing on yourself?

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