

Students to get instant feedback on English assignments with new AI system

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Upper primary and secondary school students will get instant feedback on English assignments when a new marking system powered by artificial intelligence is rolled out on the school learning portal in about two years.

The automated system will correct basic errors as well as grammar, sentence structure and expression, among others, after the Ministry of Education (MOE) makes the program available on the Student's Learning Space or SLS, according to tender documents seen by The Straits Times.

SLS is the MOE online platform used by teachers and students for e-learning and other school work, including home-based learning.

The portal also contains other learning tools such as Padlet and AhaSlides.

In tender documents put up on the government e-procurement portal GeBiz last Thursday, MOE asked for a detailed proposal and development of a working prototype of the system - coupled with pilot trials and, later, implementation.

MOE's latest push to embrace educational technology comes just two years after Deputy Prime Minister Heng Swee Keat in 2019 outlined how Singapore's national artificial intelligence (AI) strategy will focus on five key areas.

Apart from education, the other four areas are border security, logistics, healthcare and estate management.

In response to queries, MOE said the new system will provide students with quick, personalised feedback they can use to improve their English Language writing skills.

It is expected to be rolled out by 2023 and is part of efforts under the National Digital Literacy Programme, which was launched last year to strengthen students' digital literacy skills.

Mr Aaron Loh, who is divisional director at MOE's educational technology division, said: "While the programme will be focused on English Language writing for a start, MOE will consider rolling out similar systems for other subjects at a later stage."

Mr Loh added that the new system will make learning more efficient for students and teachers.

He said: "Automating the process of giving feedback on some aspects of English Language writing has been shown to encourage students to practise writing more often..."

"Students will be able to use automated feedback to help them improve their drafts before receiving more detailed feedback from their teachers."

Mr Loh said teachers can then use the time saved from correcting basic language errors to focus on higher-level skills like persuasiveness and tone.

He added that analytics gleaned from the system will help both students and teachers monitor learning and progress, which will help teachers know when they need to intervene.

He also said students will be shown how to use this tool as a source of specific, actionable feedback that complements the feedback they receive from their teachers and peers.

"This will enable teachers and students to leverage the system in improving their English Language writing skills via the SLS platform, both during lessons and beyond the classroom, and at their own pace," he said.

MOE said it will align the development of the system to Singapore's English Language syllabus, and it will be fused into English Language instructional materials and teacher resources.

Mr Heng in 2019 unveiled a road map for a national AI strategy at the Singapore FinTech Festival and Singapore Week of Innovation and Technology conference.

At the time, he said automated marking systems would be launched to mark primary and secondary English Language assignments to free up time for teachers to focus on other tasks, and that similar automated marking systems would be deployed for more subjects by 2030.

He added that AI-enabled adaptive learning systems would also be designed to cater to each student's learning abilities.