# Language as Infrastructure: English and Bilingualism (1823–2026)

Dr Alexander Ressos, TEP
Attorney-at-Law (Switzerland and Germany),
Solicitor (England & Wales and Hong Kong)
Of Counsel, KGP Legal LLC
alexander.ressos@kgplegal.com.sg
www.ressos.com.sg

- **5 June 1823**: Raffles lays the foundation stone of the Singapore Institution, renamed Raffles Institution in 1868, which later becomes an English-medium school.[1]
- **1 March 1886**: William Oldham founds the Anglo-Chinese School in a shophouse in Amoy Street with thirteen pupils.[2]
- **1949**: About 70 per cent of children of school age attend one of 319 Chinese-language schools. The University of Malaya is formed on 8 October.[3]
- **1955**: Lee Kuan Yew begins to learn Mandarin at the age of 32. Nanyang University is founded on land donated by the Hokkien Huay Kuan.[4]
- **11 November 1959**: The Legislative Assembly adopts *Majulah Singapura* as the state anthem. Malay is accepted as the national language.[5]
- **1966**: Bilingualism becomes a principle of education. Every pupil learns English and a second language, which becomes an examinable subject at the Primary School Leaving Examination.[6]

© 2026 Dr Alexander Ressos. General information only, not legal, tax or investment advice. No client relationship is created. All Singapore law advice is provided by a duly licensed and regulated firm of Singapore advocates and solicitors only on the basis of an express written letter of engagement. More information at SingaporeIQ.com and ressos.com.sg.

- **1967–1977**: The share of the Primary One cohort entering Chinese-medium schools falls from 33 to 13.75 per cent.[7]
- **7 September 1979**: Lee Kuan Yew launches the Speak Mandarin Campaign.[8]
- **August 1980**: Nanyang University merges with the University of Singapore to form the National University of Singapore.[9]
- **1987**: English becomes the medium of instruction for all subjects except the mother tongues in a single National System of Education.[10]
- **1 November 1988**: The Singapore Academy of Law is established by statute.[11]
- **November 1998**: The STAR Committee is formed. With the Manpower 21 plan of 1999 it sets out the strategy of attracting foreign talent.[12]
- **29 April 2000**: Goh Chok Tong launches the Speak Good English Movement.[13]
- **2008**: The Committee to Develop the Legal Sector recommends a measured opening to foreign law firms. Qualifying Foreign Law Practice licences follow.[14]
- **16 February 2013**: Nearly 3,000 people protest against the Population White Paper.[15]
- **2015–2016**: SkillsFuture is introduced. Every citizen aged 25 and over receives S$500 of credit for approved courses.[16]
- **2020**: English becomes the language most often spoken at home by Chinese residents. By 2025, 58.1 per cent of residents name English as their main home language.[17]
- **2021**: The High Court is divided into a General Division and an Appellate Division.[18]
- **15 September 2022**: Lawrence Wong launches the Financial Services Industry Transformation Map 2025.[19]
- **1 September 2023**: The Complementarity Assessment Framework (COMPASS) applies to new Employment Pass applications.[20]

© 2026 Dr Alexander Ressos. General information only, not legal, tax or investment advice. No client relationship is created. All Singapore law advice is provided by a duly licensed and regulated firm of Singapore advocates and solicitors only on the basis of an express written letter of engagement. More information at SingaporeIQ.com and ressos.com.sg.

- **8 January 2025**: Parliament passes the Workplace Fairness Act, which prohibits discrimination on grounds including nationality and language.[21]
- **September 2026**: The Global Financial Centres Index ranks Singapore fourth, behind New York, London and Hong Kong.[22]

## Notes

1. Wikipedia, "Raffles Institution" (accessed November 2026); see Chapter J.I. ↩
2. Wikipedia, "Anglo-Chinese School" (accessed November 2026); see Chapter J.I. ↩
3. Culturepaedia, "A common mother tongue"; Wikipedia, "National University of Singapore"; see Chapters J.I, J.II and J.IV. ↩
4. Wikipedia, "Lee Kuan Yew" and "Nanyang Technological University" (accessed November 2026); see Chapters J.I and J.IV. ↩
5. Constitution of the Republic of Singapore, Art. 152(2); Wikipedia, "Language policy in Singapore"; see Chapters J.I and J.II. ↩
6. Wikipedia, "Education in Singapore"; see Chapters J.I and J.II. ↩
7. Culturepaedia, "From Chinese-language education to bilingual education"; see Chapter J.II. ↩
8. Wikipedia, "Speak Mandarin Campaign" (accessed November 2026); see Chapters J.I and J.II. ↩
9. Wikipedia, "Nanyang University" (accessed November 2026); see Chapters J.I and J.II. ↩
10. Wikipedia, "Education in Singapore"; Culturepaedia; see Chapters J.I and J.II. ↩
11. Wikipedia, "Singapore Academy of Law" (accessed November 2026); see Chapter J.III. ↩

© 2026 Dr Alexander Ressos. General information only, not legal, tax or investment advice. No client relationship is created. All Singapore law advice is provided by a duly licensed and regulated firm of Singapore advocates and solicitors only on the basis of an express written letter of engagement. More information at SingaporeIQ.com and ressos.com.sg.

12. Wikipedia, “Immigration to Singapore” (accessed November 2026); see Chapter J.IV. ↩
13. Wikipedia, “Speak Good English Movement” (accessed November 2026); see Chapter J.I. ↩
14. Ministry of Law, “Update on Qualifying Foreign Law Practice Licences”; see Chapter J.III. ↩
15. Wikipedia, “Immigration to Singapore” and “Population White Paper” (accessed November 2026); see Chapters I.V and J.IV. ↩
16. Wikipedia, “SkillsFuture” (accessed November 2026); see Chapter J.IV. ↩
17. Wikipedia, “Singapore English” and “Languages of Singapore” (accessed November 2026); see Chapter J.I. ↩
18. Wikipedia, “Supreme Court of Singapore” (accessed November 2026); see Chapters F.I and J.III. ↩
19. Monetary Authority of Singapore, media release of 15 September 2022; see Chapter J.IV. ↩
20. Ministry of Manpower, “COMPASS”; see Chapter J.IV. ↩
21. Workplace Fairness Act 2025; Allen & Gledhill; see Chapters J.II and J.IV. ↩
22. Wikipedia, “Global Financial Centres Index” (accessed November 2026); see Chapters J.I and K.III. ↩

## Disclaimer

This article is provided for general information only. It is based on publicly available sources as at its date of publication. These sources have not been independently verified against licences, regulatory registers or the records of the entities concerned. It is not legal, tax, financial or investment advice. Nor is it a recommendation to invest in, transact with or use the services of any entity mentioned. Law and regulation change frequently, so the content may be incomplete or outdated. To the fullest

© 2026 Dr Alexander Ressos. General information only, not legal, tax or investment advice. No client relationship is created. All Singapore law advice is provided by a duly licensed and regulated firm of Singapore advocates and solicitors only on the basis of an express written letter of engagement. More information at SingaporeIQ.com and ressos.com.sg.

extent permitted by law, Dr Alexander Ressos and the publisher of SingaporeIQ exclude all liability for loss or damage arising from the use of or reliance on this article. Readers should obtain advice on their specific circumstances before acting or refraining from action.

Names and trademarks of the entities discussed belong to their owners and are used for identification only. Their mention implies no endorsement, affiliation or allegation of wrongdoing. All Singapore law advice is provided by a duly licensed and regulated firm of Singapore advocates and solicitors only on the basis of an express written letter of engagement. Corrections and updates: contact@ressos.com.

© 2026 Dr Alexander Ressos. This article may be quoted with attribution to SingaporeIQ (SingaporeIQ.com). Reproduction in full and any commercial use require prior written consent. The Legal Terms at https://singaporeiq.com/legal-terms apply.

Author contact: Dr Alexander Ressos, TEP · contact@ressos.com

© 2026 Dr Alexander Ressos. General information only, not legal, tax or investment advice. No client relationship is created. All Singapore law advice is provided by a duly licensed and regulated firm of Singapore advocates and solicitors only on the basis of an express written letter of engagement. More information at SingaporeIQ.com and ressos.com.sg.