



## SHOOT FOR THE STARS

Decked in a maroon striped shirt and a pair of jeans, the five-foot-five-inch young man approached me for an interview. At 21 years old, the Tianjin-born student had spent close to five years in Singapore. **Cheng Huimin**, who has just started his freshman year at National University of Singapore (NUS), was a former DIMENSIONS International College student.

The warm August weather set the perfect tone for that Saturday's DIMENSIONS Alumni Day, where former students gathered to share their experiences.

Cheng Huimin stepped into the cold interior of the air-conditioned office for the alumni interview, a relieving contrast from the humidity outside.

At one glance, Huimin looked like just any typical collegiate student. But little did I know, interesting details would surface as the interview progressed.

Sporting a boyish look, Huimin spoke in decent English as he recounted his former days in China before settling down in Singapore.

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### Editor's Note



I have a dream. Uttered by civil rights activist Martin Luther King, Jr., these words are so powerful that they still resonate with us in this generation. As long as you carry the seed of dreams in your hands and nurture it, you can watch as your dreams unfold. In this issue, read about our alumnus Cheng Huimin, who shows us that dreams are achievable if you show passion and perseverance.

Do you have a penchant for talking? Well, sing praises as we're featuring two oral stories: a speech contest and an oral exam. It's time to stop talking and start reading. Enjoy.

Malcolm

## NEW LIFE. NEW DIMENSION.

The only child in the family, Huimin spent most of his life in Beijing. Computer programming piqued his interest back when he was in primary school. Subsequently, he joined an interest group on programming, stacking up his bookshelves with C++ programming language reference books to satisfy his insatiable appetite for programming knowledge. In high school, his interest paid off when he bagged second prize in the National Olympiad in Informatics, an annual informatics competition for secondary school students in China. Due to regional discrimination in higher education entrance examination in China, Huimin finished only one year in high school before moving to Singapore for better education and starting a new life here.

He enrolled in the Preparatory Course at DIMENSIONS and graduated in 2011 after a year, excelling in subjects such as Math and Science except English. However, after spending a year at DIMENSIONS, Huimin's command of English has relatively made a vast improvement compared to when he was back in China.

"DIMENSIONS served as a bridge for me, giving me a solid transition from Chinese to Singaporean education," Huimin pondered. For him, the college had prepped him for better education here, helping him to tackle GCE O-level examinations and articulate his ideas.

When asked to describe DIMENSIONS in a few words, with a twinkle in his eyes, he uttered warmly: "It's the first family I have here when I came to Singapore to study.

He also had some words of wisdom for DIMENSIONS students here: "Studying is not just about passing exams, but about knowing your goals in life. Know what you want to do. Know your strengths and match them with what you want to do, and you will find success."

## LIFE AFTER DIMENSIONS

After DIMENSIONS, he moved on to another chapter of life at Singapore Polytechnic, where he took up Diploma in Aerospace Electronics. His passion for aerospace catapulted him to the Autonomous Aerial Vehicle Challenge, held in Bangkok last year. Comprised of six people, his team SP Aero took part in the challenge, which was organized by the Royal Thai Air Force (RTAF). A total of 17 teams from Singapore, Korea and Thailand participated in the Challenge.

His team built a fully autonomous quadcopter to fly at 60m height, orbit around a 100m radius at around 80km/hr, take six aerial images at given GPS waypoints and drop a 50g payload at a designated spot accurately.

Huimin's heart rocketed to the moon when Team SP Aero nabbed third place at the Challenge and came home with the prize of 100,000 baht (SGD\$4000). His team was the only polytechnic

team among the university teams and also the only foreign team to win an award for Singapore.

To Huimin, it was an accomplishment he was most proud of, and one that left an indelible impression on his mind.

Even though Huimin has achieved goals beyond his imagination, he is actually down to earth. He has a soft spot for music, which led him to join the SP Guitarists' Club and Chinese Music & Cultural

## BRIGHTER AND BETTER

Huimin knows that a field of opportunities is waiting for him to discover. Great things have happened to him, and he is on the path to realize his dreams.

However, he does have one regret: For him, he felt that the course of time he took to undergo his

higher education was longer compared to his peers. "I do feel the peer pressure," he admitted dejectedly. "Because of the delay in my studies, it took longer for me to complete my higher education compared to my peers in China."

But Huimin, perseverant by nature, is catching up quite well with his peers.

Now an undergraduate in NUS with a degree in Electrical Engineering, Huimin sees a brighter future ahead of him.

He dreams about becoming a leader in the engineering field, innovating new products that will benefit the public and simplify lives.

As the interview drew to an end, I asked Huimin to describe himself in three words. He used these adjectives: energetic, technology-savvy and curious.

As I watched him retreat into the rays of the simmering afternoon sun, I saw a soul burning with a vision for a brighter, bigger and better future.



“ Studying is not just about passing exams, but about knowing your goals in life.

Know your strengths and match them with what you want to do, and you will find

**SUCCESS.** ”

**Cheng Huimin**  
DIMENSIONS alumnus

# SOFT SPOT FOR SPEECH



The 2015 DIMENSIONS Speech Competition final was the talk of the town. Contestants showed off their speech prowess in a heated battle for the championship crown.

Held in July, the competition final saw contestants flexing their speech skills and communicating spontaneously.

Spectators were on the edge of their seats as the contestants spout a stream of words in their own unique, creative way.

The competition served as a platform for students to share ideas, exchange information, practice their speech fluency, develop their confidence, and most importantly, have a great time!

**Andre Ubriaco** was lost for words as he took home the championship title. Meanwhile, **Hou Yin Jia Yi** talked her way to second prize and **Winston** bagged third prize.

The majority of the contestants believed that the competition helped them prep for the upcoming oral examination. They praised the competition for being well-organized but had just one constructive comment: better lighting effect was needed. Now that is smart talk.





**SIMULATOR  
ORAL  
ENGLISH  
EXAMINATION**





# SPEAKING THE UNSPOKEN

Poring over English language materials, a sea of students were seen waiting at the school cafeteria. Some would say that they were waiting for their lunches. But they were not. They were prepping for the Simulator Oral English Examination.

For most of them, the mock oral exam posed one big challenge: anxiety. The People's Republic of China (PRC) Chinese students were afraid of one thing: messing up their oral exam due to nervousness.

As English is not their first language, some of these Chinese students had a trepidation that they were not going to ace the exam.

Some broke out in cold sweat even before the exam began.

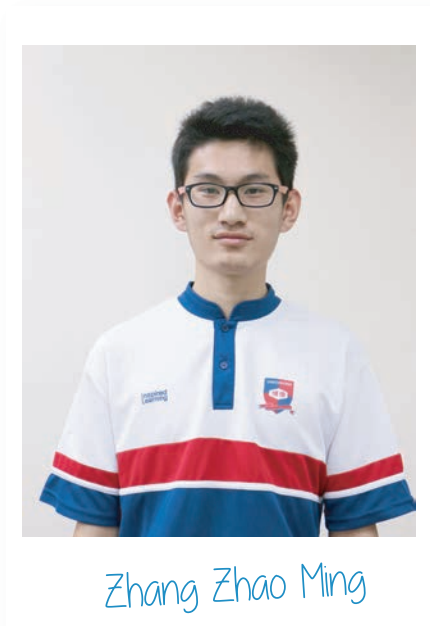
Students were huddled in the canteen, where it was designated as a waiting area before they proceeded to a room in the building where the exam was conducted. They practiced among their classmates, hoping that every bit of practice would reinforce their confidence and skills.

Even the aroma of food from the cafeteria couldn't pull them away from their seats. They were all focused and intent on doing well, even if it was just a mock exam.

"Don't be nervous, don't be nervous," 19-year-old GCE O-level student **Zhang Zhao Ming** told himself repeatedly before entering the exam room. The spunky six-foot lad had prepared for the exam, doing some solo reading at home and practicing in pairs with friends.

Ten minutes later, Zhao Ming exited the room with a look of relief on his face. He was glad that it was over, but he admitted that he had been so nervous that he felt numb.

"I didn't even know where to place my hands," Zhao Ming confessed. "There were butterflies in my stomach."



Zhao Ming was not alone. His friends were also in the same boat.

19-year-old **Wang Dani** echoed Zhao Ming's sentiments. She stumbled over some words during the exam.

"It's difficult for me when it comes to English pronunciation," Dani relived her exam moments. "I can articulate my ideas well in Chinese, but I just don't know how to convey those ideas in English."

**Yang Jia Cheng**, a year younger than Dani, committed a grammatical faux pas when he misused the quantifiers *many* and *much* with both countable and uncountable nouns. "It was challenging for me because speaking is not the same like writing. In writing, you can pause for some time to think before you write. In an oral exam, you need to juggle the difficulties of speaking spontaneously and at the same time making sure that your sentences make sense."





## TACKLE THE THREAT

The students seemed to have done every possible preparation for the mock exam, but their biggest threat still remains. So how do they overcome exam anxieties? A number of those polled gave their suggestions on battling the jitters.

"Be as natural as possible," 17-year-old **Zhang Haoxuan** advised. "Try not to be nervous. If we are nervous, we tend to speak or behave incoherently. Take a deep breath and smile at the examiners."



Zhang Hao Xuan

For 17-year-old **Ni Jia Ying**, preparation is an armor we should wear before battling the exam. "We should be fully prepared so we won't get edgy or nervous during the exam. For me, I will practice conversing in English with my roommate before I go to bed. That helps me a lot."

The majority of students who came to DIMENSIONS to study saw a vast improvement in their English.

"Before I came to DIMENSIONS, I use mostly Chinese to converse with everyone," Haoxuan recounted. "But after I came here, I use English to communicate with the teachers and students. This significantly improves my English."



Ni Jia Ying

He added that expanding one's vocabulary is crucial. "We cannot understand what an English article means if it contains a number of difficult words. Therefore, it is important to expand your vocabulary to facilitate comprehension."

Haoxuan is currently reading *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel Garcia Marquez, which he believes helps improve his English as it contains a wide use of descriptive language.

Jia Cheng also thinks that DIMENSIONS has transformed him inside out. "At first when I came to Singapore, I have very limited vocabulary. But now my English has improved tremendously since I studied here."

Jia Cheng gave a list of recommendations to improve one's English. "Immerse yourself in all kinds of English language resources," he suggested. "Listen to the BBC news, watch English television programs, and converse with your friends and teachers in English."

For Zhao Ming, reading more English books and newspapers helps improve his English. However, he admitted that difficult words can dishearten him sometimes. "There were times I felt like giving up when I stumbled upon difficult words," he confessed. "I'd look up the meanings in my mobile

phone's dictionary app, but finding the meaning of too many difficult words can be a little intimidating."

Intimidation becomes determination for Wang Dani, who believes that attitude is instrumental in polishing one's English.

"I make it a point to speak English to everyone around me," Dani declared. "When someone in class speaks to me in Chinese, I'd say, 'Speak English please'."

Dani reiterated, "To improve, you must have the determination. For me, it doesn't matter how well you speak. As long as you keep speaking, you will improve in time."

Dani reads self-help books like *The Secret* by Rhonda Byrne. "I bought this book in the English language. I look up the meaning of words I don't know. This book inspires me and teaches me new words at the same time."

For these students, learning to master English is not an easy process, but an achievable one.

Most of them agreed that the Simulator Oral English Examination was highly effective in prepping them for the upcoming actual exam.

"The mock exam gave us an opportunity to practice and gain experience as well," Haoxuan commented. "That way, we won't repeat the same mistakes in the actual exam."

As the students who had just taken the mock exam filed out of the room with relief painted over their faces, they all knew that relief was just only momentary as they had to face the upcoming exam which would test their skills the same way this exam had.

Learning to speak well wasn't their only concern. Anxiety was predominantly fraying their nerves.

A girl was waiting anxiously outside the examination room. She had prepared well, practicing with her friends earlier at the cafeteria. She mustn't show how nervous she was, even though there were tight knots in her stomach.

She took a deep breath, walked into the room, and smiled at the examiners.