Singapore trials FirstDate for public staff

LEVEL C1

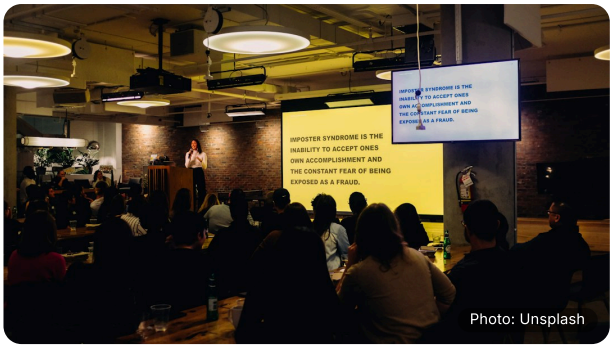


Photo: Unsplash

I. WARM-UP

1. Should governments help people meet partners? Why or why not?
2. What makes a dating app feel trustworthy to you?
3. When are age limits fair in public programmes?

II. KEY VOCABULARY

algorithm
A set of rules a computer follows to solve a problem or make matches.

pilot
A small-scale test used to try an idea before a full launch.

statutory
Created or controlled by law or a government act.

fertility
The ability to have children; often used for a country's birth rate.

discriminate
To treat people differently in a way seen as unfair.

residency
Specialist medical training after medical school; used here as a matching example.

metropolitan
Relating to a large city and its government.

demographic
Relating to population trends such as births, deaths and age.

III. READING

Singapore has launched FirstDate, a matchmaking service for government workers aged 21 to 35, as the country faces a record-low fertility rate. The pilot runs through the national digital identity system, asks about interests, habits and values, and then offers one match at a time.

FirstDate highlights the Gale-Shapley Stable Marriage algorithm, recognised by a 2012 Nobel prize in economic sciences linked to Lloyd Shapley. The method matches two equally sized groups by stated preferences. Variants have been used in public school admissions, medical residency matching and dating apps.

Supporters expect lower scam risks because all users are public servants. Critics say the pilot discriminates against non-government workers and question the age cap; some even call it "dystopian". GovTech, the statutory board behind the trial, has not said if access will widen beyond the pilot.

Demographic pressure is growing: in 2025, fewer than 30,000 babies were born, while deaths were about 26,500. In August, Prime Minister Lawrence Wong announced almost S$70,000 in support per child by age 17.

Singapore is not alone: Tokyo's metropolitan government launched an AI dating app in 2024 that, officials say, led to 265 marriages.

Reading text adapted from reporting by **BBC News***: "Singapore launches matchmaking service for...". Original article linked at theenglishwire.com.*

IV. COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Who can use FirstDate during the pilot phase?
2. What method does FirstDate use to generate matches?
3. What benefits and concerns have people expressed about the service?
4. Which agency runs the pilot, and has it promised wider access?
5. What 2025 figures show Singapore's demographic pressure?

V. DISCUSSION

1. Is limiting FirstDate to public servants fair policy or discrimination?
2. Should a public app set age caps if the goal is boosting births?
3. How much personal data should users give for safer, better matches?
4. Do AI matching systems bring more benefits or risks to society?

VI. GRAMMAR FOCUS

Ellipsis and substitution

Ellipsis and substitution avoid repetition. Use do/did so to replace a verb phrase; think/hope/believe + so/not for a clause; one/ones/that/those for nouns; and So/Neither + auxiliary + subject for agreement.

"Some support expansion; ***so might others****."*
"These requirements are strict; ***those*** *aren't."*

VII. GRAMMAR EXERCISE

Choose the correct option in each sentence.

1. Supporters agree, and (officials so do / so do officials). _____
2. Will FirstDate open to all workers? I (hope it / hope so). _____
3. This pilot is new; that (one / it) is older. _____
4. Critics don't like the age cap; (neither I do / neither do I). _____
5. GovTech may widen access; it hasn't (done so / so done) yet. _____

Teacher's Notes

TEACHERS ONLY

These notes are designed to help you get the most out of this lesson. Please do not share this page with students.

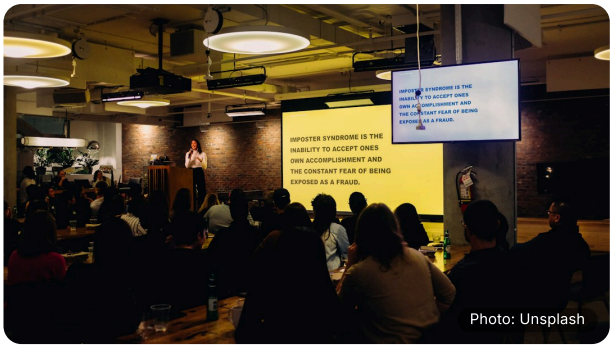


Photo: Unsplash

I. LESSON GUIDE

- Timing: 8–10 minutes warm-up, 10 minutes vocabulary, 12–15 minutes reading and comprehension, 8–10 minutes grammar, 12–15 minutes discussion.
- Pre-teach or concept-check: algorithm, pilot, statutory, fertility, discriminate, residency, metropolitan, demographic; board them and elicit quick examples.
- Run the reading in two passes: gist (what, who, why), then details (ages, numbers, agency, outcomes). Sensitivity: the story involves dating, age limits and fertility; keep discussion on policy rather than private lives, and allow students to opt out of personal sharing.
- Differentiation: stronger students summarise how the algorithm works in two sentences; others map stakeholders (users, GovTech, critics) with one benefit or concern for each.

II. DISCUSSION FACILITATION TIPS

1. Poll the room, then pair students with opposing views to find one fair rule together.
2. Push for a concrete cap or no cap and one reason tied to public goals.
3. If answers stall, list two data types (ID, interests) and debate pros/cons of each.
4. Split groups: one argues benefits, one risks; then switch sides for a rebuttal.

III. EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

Debate: In teams, write and deliver a 90-second statement for or against limiting access to FirstDate.

Writing: In pairs, draft a 100-word announcement GovTech could publish about the pilot's next steps.

IV. ANSWER KEY OVERVIEW

Comprehension questions: short factual answers from the text.

Grammar exercise: Ellipsis and substitution

Discussion: open-ended. Accept any reasonable ideas supported by examples and reasoning.

Answer Key

TEACHERS ONLY

These answers are for teachers only. Please do not share this page with students.

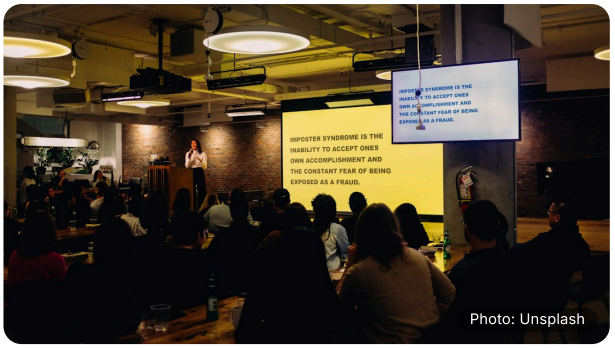


Photo: Unsplash

IV. COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Who can use FirstDate during the pilot phase?
   Government workers aged 21 to 35.
2. What method does FirstDate use to generate matches?
   The Gale-Shapley Stable Marriage algorithm using users' stated preferences.
3. What benefits and concerns have people expressed about the service?
   Supporters expect fewer scams; critics see discrimination and dislike the age cap.
4. Which agency runs the pilot, and has it promised wider access?
   GovTech runs it; it has not said if access will widen.
5. What 2025 figures show Singapore's demographic pressure?
   Fewer than 30,000 births and about 26,500 deaths.

V. DISCUSSION

Open answers. Accept any reasonable ideas supported by examples and reasoning.

VI. GRAMMAR FOCUS

Key point: Ellipsis and substitution avoid repetition. Use do/did so to replace a verb phrase; think/hope/believe + so/not for a clause; one/ones/that/those for nouns; and So/Neither + auxiliary + subject for agreement. (Examples constructed.)

"Some support expansion; **so might others**.*"*

"These requirements are strict; **those** *aren't."*

VII. GRAMMAR EXERCISE

Choose the correct option in each sentence.

1. Supporters agree, and (officials so do / so do officials). **so do officials**
2. Will FirstDate open to all workers? I (hope it / hope so). **hope so**
3. This pilot is new; that (one / it) is older. **one**
4. Critics don't like the age cap; (neither I do / neither do I). **neither do I**
5. GovTech may widen access; it hasn't (done so / so done) yet. **done so**