

ICT exposure of Sri Lankan youth: a key for development

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The general objective of this study is to elucidate the level of computer literacy and exposure to the internet among Sri Lankan youth (aged 15-29) based on their main activity, namely- student, employed, unemployed and inactive household members. To achieve this objective, quantitative data were collected administering a pre-coded questionnaire to a national sample of 3000 households covering 22 districts in Sri Lanka.

For the purpose of the study a person was deemed IT literate if a person could operate any function on a computer by themselves. The key finding of the study was that out of 2921 respondents 57% of youth were computer literate. Of the 18-24 age group 65% could manage basic functions of the computer as opposed to the 25-29 year olds where only a 43% demonstrated knowledge in computer. This indicates that the older group had a lesser opportunity at gaining a computer education, as it is a fairly recent development in Sri Lanka. Moreover, when respondents were demarcated by main activity it became evident that the student population had the highest level of exposure to knowledge in computers with three-quarter (75%) being computer literate. The lowest attainment of computer literacy was demonstrated by the category of persons who were engaged in household work, whereby only 30% were computer literate.

Almost 60% of the male respondents were computer literate when compared to the 55% computer literate females. Encouragingly the study reveals that the percentage of youth who have never used a computer is as low as 6%.

In total 33% of youth who have basic knowledge in computer usage have their own computers and in terms of main activity the employed category had the highest ownership (38%) of computers. As is depicted by the survey out of the 57% youth who are computer literate 50% use their computer on a daily/weekly basis indicating the frequency at which they use the computers.

Of the total youth population one-third had used the internet. The highest percentage of internet usage (42 percent) is observed among students, while the lowest is among the inactive household members. When the purpose of use of internet was analysed 35% and 26% of internet users used it for academic purposes and web browsing respectively. The respondents who used the internet were asked how much time they spend online in a week and of this 91% have spent less than 5 hours a week.

Students have the most amount of access to the internet via their school or university which imply that they have access to internet from their educational institutions free or with very nominal charge. It is revealed that almost 52% students have the opportunity to access internet through their learning centre. Whilst observing by gender distribution a higher proportion of interviewed females use the internet in academic institutions much more than the male respondents. However, it is becoming evident that the internet presents risks as well as opportunities to adolescent development in the knowledge-economy.