Census Department measures Computer Literacy of Sri Lanka

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The Department of Census and Statistics is currently conducting a survey on Computer Literacy covering the whole country. The term computer literacy is defined in many different ways. The simplest way one is thinking how to use a computer having knowledge or being literate of the technology. It is also defined as the ability to perform basic computer skills consistently and to apply these skills to home, education or employment environments.

Although the needs for statistics on Information Technology (IT) have been rapidly increasing in recent years, this is the first attempt to cover this field. The term IT literacy covers a wide range from literacy on using computers for simple basic activities such as word processing to literacy on advanced operations such as navigation systems.

This survey focuses only on the computer literacy but not the entire scope of IT literacy. For the purpose of this survey, a person is considered as computer literate if he/she can use a computer on his/her own to perform any task. For example, if a six-year-old child can play a game on his own, he is considered as a computer literate.

This survey is expected to provide baseline information on current levels of computer usage in households of Sri Lanka. The society gets deeper into the technological age, Internet access and computer literacy are becoming more important. The Internet is an amazing development based on the convergence of the computer and the communication technologies. The traditional constraints of space and time are no more there and the whole world is almost becoming a global electronic village.

Now it is possible to communicate through the Internet as well as have real time access to digital documents. International collaboration is now possible in teaching, learning, publishing and resource sharing through Internet.

In addition to estimating the literacy, the ratio of population who is currently using information communication tools namely e-mail and internet will be estimated based on the data collected from the survey. The purposes for which these tools are used are also investigated.

The computer literacy is a must to be benefited from applications of the innovations of IT. In Sri Lanka computers are progressing gradually as television once did. In addition to the offices, over the past few years, computers have been penetrating into households as well. The luxury of e-mailing messages as opposed to charging up the phone bills is more appealing. Checking news and examination results and sports via the internet is convenient that many are taking the advantage of.

Computer literacy is becoming an important qualification. Those illiterate in computer technology will significantly be handicapped. A variety of changes is taking place due to innovations of applications of IT in the people’s lifestyle, labour and education. Promotion, in using IT in many areas such as electronic commerce, creation of new businesses and realisation of electronic government. Therefore, it is very important that this issue be addressed and a change attempted to ensure that all citizens have an equal opportunity in life and at getting a job.

One benefit of the computer age is that children are becoming smarter. Children develop computer literacy by observing others at the computers and by diving in and actively exploring different software programs. As with learning to read, each child progresses at the rate appropriate to that child. By and large, children are curious and pick up fast. They are growing up in computer literate and will have that as an added advantage. The statistics compiled by this survey is expected to reveal computer literacy of children by spatial and demographic characteristics too.

Studies have indicated that many different factors can influence an individual’s level of computer literacy. Many people who do not have access to computers and computer technology are poor and less educated computer users. The cost of training and the predominantly texts being in English medium on the Internet are some factor which contribute to this division significantly.

This division is popularly known as digital divide. Digital divide is defined as the gap between those who can effectively use new information and communication tools, such as the Internet, and those who cannot. The digital divide can be seen in developed countries as well. For example only 36% of Canadians have a home computer and only 13% are connected to the internet.

In terms of public policy, there is a growing concern about the implications of the ‘digital divide’, where some social groups lack the means of access new ICT, while others reap labour market rewards for being on the cutting edge of these technologies. This contributes to further alienation of the country’s underprivileged people, particularly those residing in the country’s rural areas.

Digital Divide is therefore could be seen as a scourge that needs to be eradicated, if Sri Lanka wants to move forward, integrate with the global village and participate in the worldwide economy. The Government of Sri Lanka is working towards the realisation of knowledge-emergent society in which citizens actively use IT and derive maximum benefits from it by minimising the digital division.

The statistics on digital divide of Sri Lanka is yet to be determined. Information that would be compiled by the Computer Literacy Survey would pave the way to begin proper studies and make recommendations on minimising digital division of Sri Lanka.

For better planning, implementation and monitoring of projects aiming at passing full benefits of the IT to all citizens of Sri Lanka, by minimising digital division, a comprehensive examination of computer use in workplaces, homes and community settings is required. The extent of the digital divide is primarily determined from household ownership and use of a computer and computer-related technologies. Home computer use is generally considered more important and more valuable than a computer, the cost of training, and the predominately texts being in English medium on the Internet are some factor which contribute to this division significantly.

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