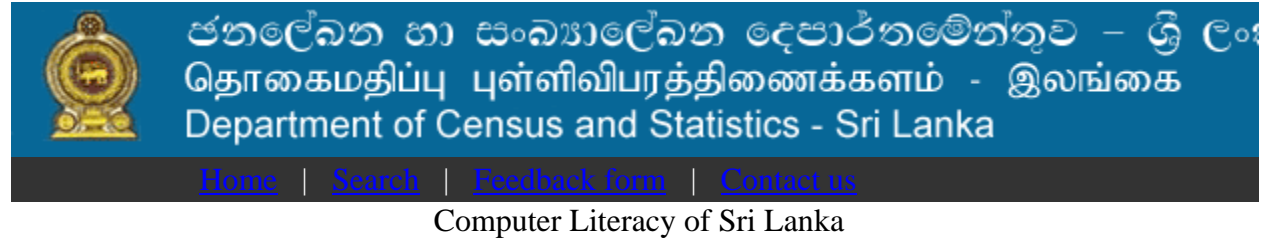


Computer Literacy in Sri Lanka



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By

Dr. Amara Satharasinghe - Deputy Director - Information Unit

HIGHLIGHTS

MAP ON COMPUTER LITERACY

The successive governments of Sri Lanka have taken many progressive initiatives to develop Information and Communication Technology (ICT) sector in Sri Lanka. For all citizens, ICT has been found to be beneficial as ICT can provide solutions to the various needs of the citizens. For citizens to get the maximum benefits from these projects they need to be computer literate.

Certain groups are far less likely than others to have computers or online access. Lack of such access affects the ability of children to improve their learning with educational software, adults to acquire valuable technology skills, and families to benefit from them. This phenomenon is called digital divide. There is growing concern about the implications of 'digital divide', whereby some social groups lack the means to access new Information and Communication Technologies, while others reap labour market rewards for being on the cutting edge of these technologies.

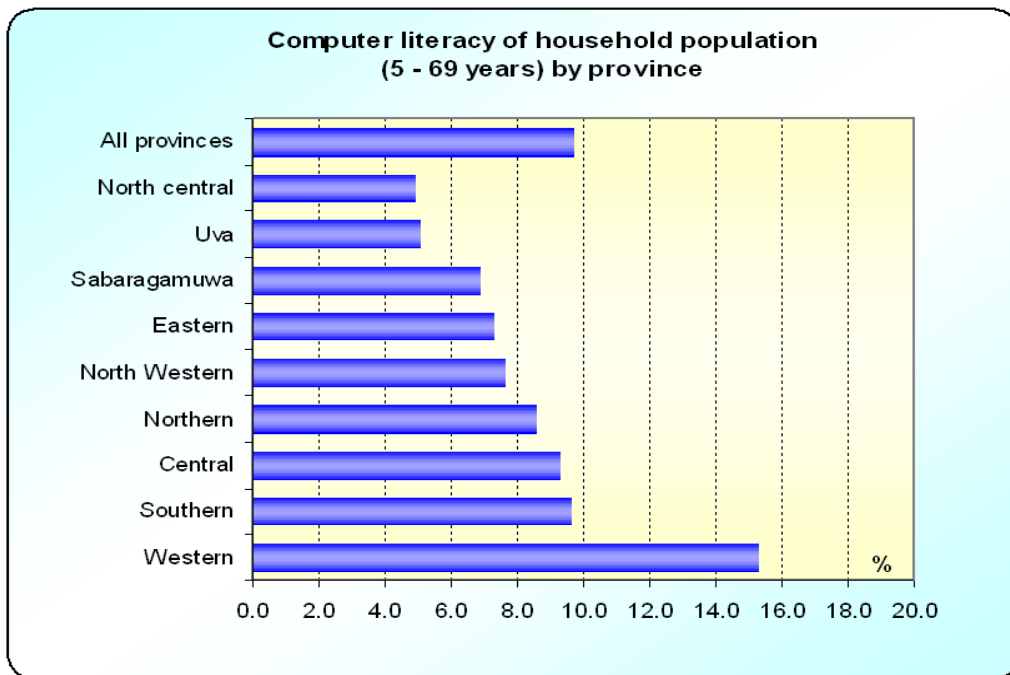
To plan and implement strategies to minimize this gap, a comprehensive examination of computer use in work places, homes and community settings is required. The extent to which students have access to computers at school and at home may be an indicator of how well prepared students will be to enter into technological workplaces which demands computer literacy.

The Department of Census and Statistics conducted a pilot study to assess the computer literacy of household population in the group of 5 – 69 years of Sri Lanka as well as to find out to what extent they use computers for various activities including use of e-mail and internet facilities. Availability of home computers, e-mail and internet facilities etc in the households were also

assessed by this study. This study was conducted as a household survey. Household members in the age group of 5 – 69 years of scientifically selected 11,500 households covering all districts other than Mulativu and Kilinochchi were interviewed.

Sri Lanka is still not a fully-fledged computer user. Therefore, it is not possible to adopt definitions on computer literacy used by developed countries. In defining computer literacy for this survey, some sort of level of comfort around computers rather than a look of fear and a feeling of foreboding was used. For this survey a person was considered as computer literate if he/she could do something on his/her own using a computer. For example, if a child of 5 years old could play a game using a computer on his/her own, he/she was considered as computer literate. Some key findings of this study are described below.

Estimation of computer literacy of the household population in the age group of 5 to 69 years of Sri Lanka was the main objective of this study. At national level, 10 percent of the above population is computer literate. Western Province reported the highest computer literacy rate of 15.3 percent and the lowest percentage of 5 percent was reported from Uva and North Central provinces.



The highest computer literacy rate of 20 percent was reported from the Colombo district. Over 10 percent literacy rates were reported from Gampaha, Kalutara, Kandy and Matara districts. The Monaragala district reported the lowest computer literacy rate of 3 percent.

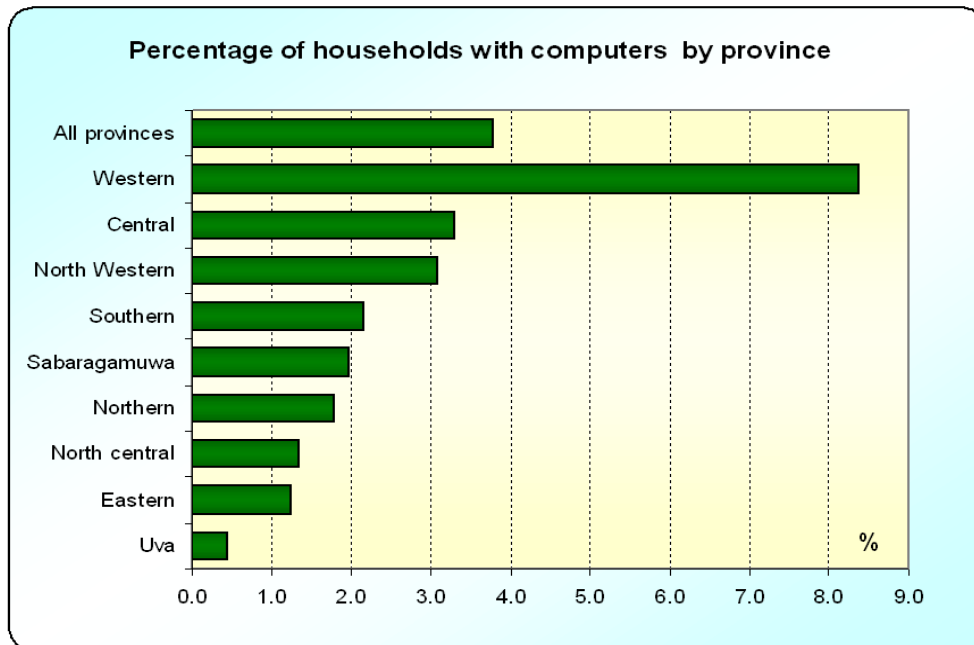
In order to quantify the awareness about computers, it was asked from the household members whether they were knowledgeable about at least one use/application of computers. Computers are used for wide range of activities starting from playing games to applications in aeronautics. Members, who were aware about at least one of those uses, were considered as

knowledgeable/aware about computers.

Nationally 18 percent of the population in the age group of 5 to 69 years is aware about computers. Highest percentage (25%) of awareness about computers was reported from the Western Province while the lowest percentage of 8 percent was reported from the Uva province.

The highest computer awareness of 32% was reported from the Colombo district. The next higher percentages (18% – 29%) were reported from a belt of districts consisted of Matara, Galle, Kalutara, Gampaha, Kurunegala, Matale, and Ampara districts. Lowest percentages (4.7% - 7.7%) were reported from Mannar, Batticaloa, Nuwara Eliya and Monaragala districts.

On the average, four out of one hundred households possess a computer. Availability of computers in households is highest in the Western province (8 percent) and this is followed by the Central and North Western provinces (3 percent). Uva province reported the lowest percentage of 0.4 percent.



Reflecting the digital division, significant unequal availability of computers in households is seen by sector. While 10 percent of urban households possess a computer, only 3 percent of rural households do so. It is even lower, just 0.3 percent in estate households.

Printers and CD drives are essential basic accessories of personal computers. Educational materials in many fields of studies are now available in Compact Disks. Out of 100 households with computers there are printers in 42 households. There is no wide variation of households having computers with printers across sectors: urban and rural. CD drives, however are available in more urban households (67 percent) than in the rural households (59 percent).

On the average, e-mail facility is available only in 9 out of 1000 households. The availability varies from one household per 1000 in the North Central and Uva provinces to 23 households per 1000 in the Western Province. On the average, nearly one fourth of the households having computers have e-mail facility. This percentage is highest (28.5 percent) for the Western province and lowest (9.6 percent) for the North Central Province.

Percentage of households with Internet facility is 0.7%. That is on the average, this facility is available only in 7 households per 1000 households. The highest percentage of 1.8 was reported from the Western Province. There is only one household with Internet facility per 1000 households in North Central, Uva and Sabaragamuwa Provinces.

Almost one fifth of the households having computers have internet facility. There is a clear difference in this percentage between urban (25%) and rural (16%) sectors. Due to the limitations in statistical reliability statistics for estate sector were not compiled.

At national level, over 40 percent of the home computers have been acquired within 24 months prior to the survey. This proportion is higher in rural areas (47 percent) than in urban areas (39 percent).

Nationally, 53 percent of households use their home computers for only 10 hours or less per week. Only about one fifth of the households use their home computers for 20 hours or more per week. In urban sector, about one fourth of housing units use their home computers over 25 hours per week and this percentage for the rural sector is 19 percent.

Only 3.8 percent of the households have home computers. From the selected households without computers, it was asked how they meet their needs requiring use of a computer. Very strikingly, 78 percent of the households said they did not need these facilities. According to the responses of the households 14 percent of them meet these needs through private institutions such as communication centers, cyber cafes etc. Reported percentages corresponding to friends/relatives and office/work places are 3 percent and 4 percent respectively.

From a sub sample of households without computers, it was asked whether they feel the need of acquiring home computers soon. The majority (64%) reported that they did not feel the need of acquiring a home computer soon, possibly due to the lack of knowledge (computer illiteracy) and resources. On the average, little over one third (36%) of the households indicated that they strongly feel the need. Over 40 percent of the households in Southern, Central and Uva provinces reported that they strongly feel the need of having a home computer soon.

It was asked from the household members those who use computers, how frequently they used computers (home and other) during the three months prior to the survey. Only 15 percent said that they used it at high levels. Another 36 percent have said that their use is at medium level. Almost half the population have used computers at low levels.

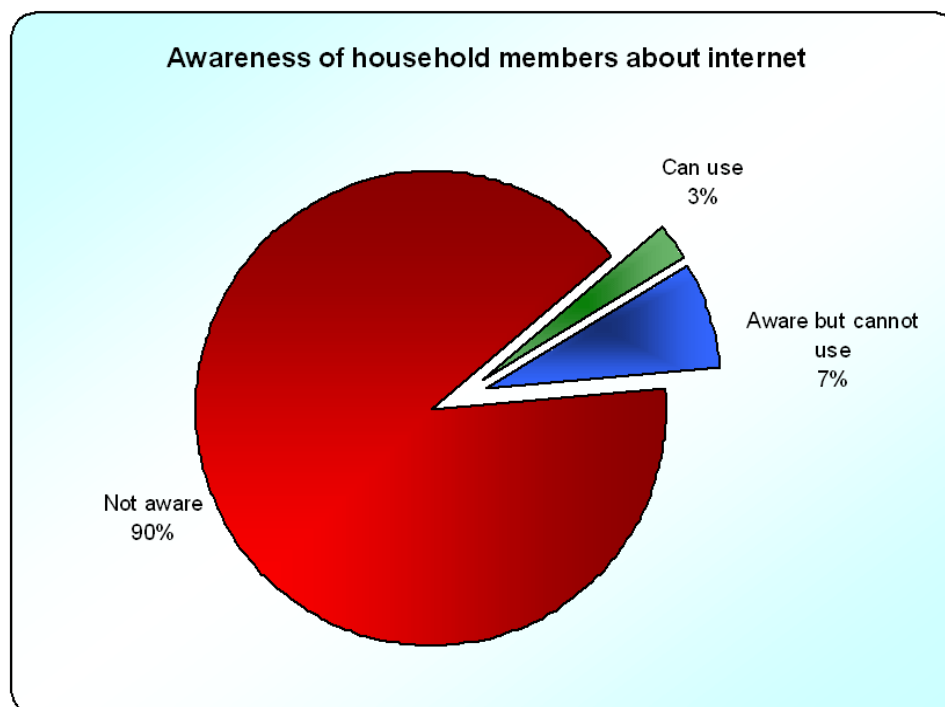
People can use e-mail either on their own or if they are only aware about this facility, with the help of others. Only 3 percent of the household population in the age group of 5 to 69 years can use e-mail on their own. Another 7 percent are aware about this facility. The majority (90

percent) are even not aware about e-mails.

Overall only 17 percent of the household population in the age group of 5 – 69 years and have ever used e-mails, have either used e-mail on their own or with the help of others at least once during the three months prior to the survey. Northern province reported the highest percentage of 39 percent followed by the Western province (26.7). This survey was not conducted in the Mulativu and Kilinochchi districts of the Northern province.

It was asked from them where they used this facility. Half of them have used this facility in their work places. One fourth of them have used it in their homes. E-mail facility has been used in private places, educational institutions such as schools, universities etc., friends/relatives and other places. Reported percentages corresponding to these places were estimated to be 17, 12, 10 and 2 percent respectively.

Only about 3 percent of the household population in the age group of 5 to 69 years can use Internet on their own. Another 7 percent are aware of Internet but they can use it only with the help of others. Strikingly the majority (90 percent) is even not aware about this facility.



It was asked from those who have used Internet during the period of three months prior to the survey, where this facility was used. They were requested to identify three most relevant places. Largely (40 percent) internet users have used it in their work places/offices. Little over 20 percent have mentioned home and private institutions such as communication centers/cyber cafes etc. About 13 percent have used this facility in their friends/relatives homes.

It was asked from those who have used Internet at least once during the three months prior to the

survey, how frequently they have used it. The percentage who have used it at high level was estimated to be 15 percent. The percentage corresponding to 'Medium' is 55 percent. Internet has been used at low levels by 30 percent of the household population.

Nationally, about 27 percent of the households having computers have experienced faults in home computers during the three months prior to the survey. Possibly due to the heavy use, this percentage is higher for urban sector (31%) compared to rural sector (24%).

Although the computers, Internet and e-mail have been around in households, work places, schools and universities in the country, no studies have been done on the level of usage of these facilities. Therefore, findings of this study can be used as baseline data for measuring e-readiness and by repeating this study at regular intervals preferably annually, impact of various interventions that had been implemented to take the country to the digital age can be evaluated and if necessary, corrective actions can be taken. It is hoped that the information compiled using data collected in this survey can bring about improvements in how these facilities should be introduced and used.

A copy of the full report can be obtained from the Department's Sales Counter, No. 231, Galle Road, Bambalapitiya, Colombo 4.

Department of Census and Statistics

P O Box 563, Colombo, Sri Lanka - Telephone: +94 112675297, Fax: 2697594 -

Email: information@statistics.gov.lk