

How students surge ahead on IT highway

Vasudha Venugopal

CHENNAI: For Shyamalatha Kannan, mother of a teen-aged boy who owns a range of gizmos, it is a treat watching him operate all of them with utmost dexterity. Her concern, however is, "He surfs pages which we do not even understand."

Internet freak he is but strangely, social networking does not interest her son, class XI student Anand Kannan because, "The web has so much more to offer," he says, showing his browsing list on gadget reviews, digital advertising and multimedia technology.

Participating in tech events hosted by companies has been Anand's area of interest since he was in class VI, of which he says, "It is a different world, unlike regular debates and quizzes where the focus is on knowing history and random facts." "I also like the tech-events because the prizes are huge," adds the teenager, flaunting the Xbox and a Dell tablet that he recently won at a tech quiz.

Anand is just one of the city-based students who, according to a recent study by Tata Consultancy Services, is in the forefront of setting new standards in the exploration of technology. The study, carried out as part of their an-

nual IT wiz inter-school quiz, reveals that Chennai with the highest number of participants, records the second-highest performance in technology-related aspects, next only to Lucknow, leaving behind 10 other cities. This is even as most schools in Chennai bar the use of internet during school hours.

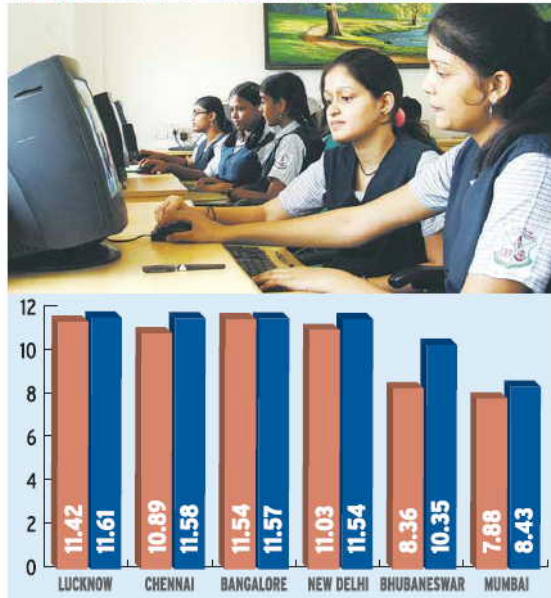
On this contradiction, Giri Balasubramanyam of Pickbrain that conducted the study along with TCS has an answer. "The interest in technology arises more out of peer group learning and learning at home. Even IT-friendly cities such as Bangalore and Pune have the same rigour of school curriculum, but they lag much behind Chennai," he adds.

Widening perspectives

Interestingly, this knowledge of technology helps students overcome the differences of high school stream barriers of belonging to strictly commerce, science or arts background, says S. Aparna, a computer teacher in a city school.

Experts also say that technology fairs and quizzes help in instilling interest. "We noticed that once our regional rounds were over in Hyderabad, children started forming groups on the net to connect with other participants," says

PERFORMANCE OF CHILDREN IN TECHNOLOGY RELATED QUESTIONS



Source: Tata Consultancy Services, Greycaps India Pvt. Ltd.

TEACHING & LEARNING

a TCS official. Also, places including Bhubaneswar and Coimbatore where the tech events were introduced recently are much behind the other cities.

And are all the students good at answering questions on technology aware of the concepts? Not necessarily,

says Mr. Balasubramanyam. "There is often rigorous preparation involved with the support of schools," he adds. Cities such as Bangalore and even smaller ones like Kochi and Lucknow have dedicated coaching classes. The attempt is to help the child acknowledge the fact that technology

influences every sector of life including movies, sports music, gaming, blogging and cell phones, and that he/she needs to access technology as an athlete or even as a doctor, says Mr Balasubramanyam.

A study by McAfee in top schools across the country had revealed that 79% of the parents polled in Chennai said their children had an e-mail account, second highest after Delhi. A student's approach to computers is influenced by how parents see it.

"One might think it is bad for eyesight and contributes to obesity and cuts the child off from people around him. The parent also needs to realise that internet connects the child with the rest of the world. Excessive restrictions on the use of computers might often make the child view the computer as an exquisite tool to be used sometimes instead of a widely-used everyday necessity," says Sukanya Balakrishnan, a child psychologist.

For others, however, there is yet another digital divide to fight. "What we study as part of our computer syllabus is very basic and there are no updates too. The few interested in technology keep talking about it and follow the news regularly, we just watch," says S. Avinash, a XI student of Sri Ramaswami Mudaliar School.