

Tertiary students in S'pore not as tech-savvy as they think: Study

Tests show that their digital proficiency levels fall short of global standards

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SINGAPORE – Despite being “digital natives”, youths here are not as well-equipped for the digital economy as they think: A study has found that Singaporean tertiary students overestimate their level of proficiency in digital literacy skills, including word processing and spreadsheets.

Conducted by International Com-

puter Driving Licence (ICDL) Asia, the study, Perception and Reality, measured the students’ actual information and communication technology (ICT) literacy standards against their perceived proficiency in such skills.

It involved 373 Singaporean students, who were mostly between 20 and 22 years old, from eight higher-education institutions such as Temasek Polytechnic, Singapore Polytechnic, National University of Singapore, Singapore Management University (SMU), Kaplan Singapore and PSB Academy.

Nearly 90 per cent of the Singaporean participants in the study, conduct-

ed between February and May, rated their skills from “fair” to “excellent”. However, the participants’ average competency standard — based on the results of their ICDL tests — stood at 55 per cent, which is “relatively low” compared to the global passing standard mark of 75 per cent, the study noted. Its findings were presented at the ICDL Digital Literacy Day at the SMU yesterday.

During the study, students were tested on various modules such as Web browsing, file and data management, word processing and spreadsheets in a 20-question online practical test. The modules were mapped to the Workforce Skills Qualifications (WSQ) framework under the Ministry of Education. The results showed that students here overestimated their digital literacy standards in basic application software.

While their perceived proficiency levels for word processing and spreadsheets were 68 per cent and 60 per cent respectively, their actual proficiency levels stood at around 45 per cent and 35 per cent respectively.

Students performed better in ICT concepts, and file and data management, with a score of 72 per cent and 68 per cent respectively — although still short of the global passing standard.

The study noted that the lack of digital skills risks social, economic

and political exclusion, as ICT plays a key role in employment, education and civic engagement, as well in leisure and entertainment.

Mr Damien O’Sullivan, chief executive of the ICDL Foundation, an international organisation that aims to raise digital competence standards, said that employers are now looking at candidates with the most experience, as well as the best soft skills and customer engagement. “You don’t have to be the best academically qualified to be the most valuable employee in the organisation,” said Mr O’Sullivan, 52.

Given the importance of ICT competency in today’s labour market, several local institutions have developed ways to integrate the necessary digital skills into their classes.

For example, all SMU business students are required to complete the spreadsheet course Computer as an Analysis Tool, which helps them to acquire practical skills in modelling and resolving business problems using personal computers.

However, students cannot completely rely on obtaining such skills from their universities, said Ms Swapna Gottipati, 41, an assistant professor of information systems at SMU.

“They need to go and get skills from other places — through internships, projects, workshops or additional short courses,” she added.