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17-year-old to show off Easy Education software

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - To be showcased alongside a host of world-class companies, industrial organisations and government agencies at a premier exhibition, would be an intimidating prospect for most teenagers.

Shawn Tan, 17, however, takes in his stride the recognition which he has received for developing his software application called "Easy Education" - a far cry from starting out as the family typist, five years ago.

The youngest exhibitor at ITX '98 to be held later this month, Tan hopes to introduce his programme to the public, especially students, educationists and companies which may be interested in developing it as a product.

"Basically, the programme schedules time for studying and other activities as well as evaluates students' understanding and performance in their lessons.

"I got the idea when my friends and I were studying for the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia examinations - it seemed there must be a quicker, more effective way to map out time for different subjects, keep track of what we had revised and test our understanding."

Tan said students could also set priority levels for each of their academic subjects and the programme could allot more or less time for each subject as needed.

He drafted out the programme before his SPM examinations and only began working on it after that.

"My parents were a bit worried that I was spending too much time on it and not enough on my studies."

Apparently, Tan spent more than enough time studying, as he scored 9A1s in the exams.

Currently, he spends much of his time improving and "debugging" the programme, which also needs input from academic experts and teachers in terms of setting questions to test student performance in various subjects.

Although the price of the software would be determined later, he emphasised that the aim of commercialising it was to make it accessible and affordable for students, and that he hoped the range would be "somewhere around RM30".

However, Tan maintained that information technology was only a hobby for him. He is considering several options for further studies, including engineering and medicine.

"People don't have to be intimidated by IT. You can learn to use technology to improve your quality of life, without making it your whole life.

"I started out as the family typist when my father first bought a computer five years ago. Then I began getting really interested in programming."

Tan then taught himself programming languages such as C++, Pascal and Basic, by reading the manuals and experimenting.

"There is no short cut - the application itself makes life easier but to be successful in developing it, takes hard work and a lot of trial and error."

Tan said it was possible for many more Malaysians - companies, young students and middle-aged people - to develop and use localised IT applications, as demonstrated by the thrust on local innovations and

brands at ITX '98, to be opened by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad on April 21.

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