



Teachers in India help students in the West master maths and science through Internet tuitions.

By Stephen David.
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Little did George W. Bush know that his remarks would so drastically overturn 60-year-old Lalitha Venkatesan's plans for a retired life in Bangalore. Reluctance among American youngsters to master maths and science had prompted the US President in his State of the Union address in January to observe, "We need to encourage children to take more maths and science and to make sure those courses are rigorous enough to compete with other nations."

A mathematics and English teacher in Delhi for nearly 25 years, Venkatesan had retired as vice-principal and moved to Bangalore to look after her grandchildren. But her passion for instructing students received a fillip, compelling her to once again wield the chalk—rather, the mouse—for night classes conducted over the Internet.

"The big advantage is that you can sit at home and teach," she says. Her paraphernalia: a webcam, speaker and a good computer to facilitate face-to-face interaction.

Today, together with Venkatesan, 50-odd teachers have signed up with the Bangalore-based company to teach students in the US and the UK to work their way around such seemingly insurmountable obstacles like fractal geometry and Pythagorean Triples in maths. The company charges the students directly, the fees ranging between Rs 100 and Rs 200 an hour depending on the topic. Utilising voice or instant messaging and an erasable "white board" function, tuition is offered in a number of subjects to pupils from kindergarten to Class XII, and also college students preparing for select entrance and state assessment exams.

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