

Report on Evaluation of “EasyNow” Tool Kit

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Background

The Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA), New Delhi is a centre established by Commonwealth of Learning (COL), Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. The purpose is to enhance the greater use of communication technologies and educational media resources in distance teaching by establishing co-operation among the Asian Countries of the Commonwealth.

The CEMCA has organized a series of capacity building workshops on utilizing different open source softwares to use effectively in the teaching sessions for academic staff members in many institutions/universities in Asian countries. The aim of these training session was to develop the competency among the academic staff members to develop multiple deliverables from a single electronic source (from a self-instructional lesson) using open source softwares (EasyNow). These deliverables as follows:

- Text
- ODL Format
- Classroom video presentation
- Enriched video presentation - slide show,
- Audio
- Text to Audio
- Lesson for visually impaired persons (Magnifier)
- VCD for players
- DVD for players.

These training workshops have been conducted in many institutions/universities in Asia since 2008. Approximately 12-38 academic/administrative/technical staff members have participated in each training session. The duration of the training workshop varies from 2-5 days. Mostly, the participants developed the products as a team. These workshops were held in eleven institutions in India, one in Bangladesh, one in Maldives, three in Malaysia and two in Sri Lanka (www.cemca.org). The names of the institutions/person, dates of the workshop and the number of participants are illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1 – Name of the institution/person, dates of the workshop and number of participants (Source: <http://eduframe.net/>, as at 21 September 2011).

| Name of the institution/person | Dates of the workshop | Number of participants |
|--|---|--------------------------------|
| Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL) - Sri Lanka | 30-31 January and 1,5-6, February 2008 | 11 |
| Yashwantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University (YCMOU) - India | 21-23 February 2008 | 14 |
| Tamilnadu Open University (TOU) - India | 6-12 May 2008 | 10 |
| Departments of Education and Higher Education (CCE)-Maldives | 22-26 June 2008 | 19 |
| Central Institute of Educational Technology, NCERT (CIET) - India | 6-8, 11-12 August 2008 | 12 |
| Open University of Malaysia (OUM) - Malaysia | 15-18 September 2008 | 24 |
| B R Ambedkar Open University (BRAOU) - India | 3-7 November 2008 | 15 |
| Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL) -Sri Lanka | 6-9 January 2009 | 12 (conducted by the trainers) |
| Acharya Narendra Dev College (ANDC)- India | 20-25 April 2009 | 25 |
| D.Net -Bangladesh | 6-9 December 2009 | 13 |
| Dr A S Pandian (pandian physics.eduframe.net) based on EasyNow Net Video Development Workshop, Anna University - India | 29-30 January 2010 1-5 February 2010 | Not applicable |
| Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL) -Sri Lanka | 8-11 February 2010 | 14 (conducted by the trainers) |
| National Institute of Education (NIE) - Sri Lanka | 2-6 March 2010 | 38 |
| Advanced Easy Now Trainers' Workshop Wawasan Open University, Malaysia | 21-25 June 2010 | 20 |
| Indira Gandhi National Open university, India | 5-9 July 2010 | 23 |
| Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL) -Sri Lanka | 13-15 July 2010 | 7 (conducted by the trainers) |
| KSR Group of Institutions - India | 2-6 August 2010 | 20 |
| University of Malaya-Malaysia | 22-25 November 2010 | 24 |
| Shri Vishnu Engineering College for Women: Bhimavaram (JNTU) - India | 4- 8 July 2011 | 20 |
| Mahatma Gandhi Rural Community College - India | 11-13 July 2011 | 20 |
| Portal content created by SIET | 18-19 July 2011 | 20 |

| | | |
|---|--|--|
| (SIET.eduframe.net) based on EasyNow Net Video Development Workshop: State Institute of Educational Technology (SIET) - India | | |
|---|--|--|

Objectives of the study

The objectives of this study is to find out

- the effectiveness of the training workshops
- to what extent these EasyNow techniques have been helpful to the institution/participants
- to what extent the participants use their knowledge after the training workshops.

Methodology

The data were collected from the participants using a questionnaire and followed up with telephone interviews. Information related to training workshops and the number and type of outputs were obtained by viewing the CEMCA website on EasyNow (<http://eduframe.net/>).

Instruments

The questionnaire was designed in such way to include both closed and open ended questions to obtain in-depth views from the participants (Annex 1).

Administration of the instruments

List of the participants were taken from the CEMCA site and sent the questionnaire along with the official letter by CEMCA to all the participants via email. Several reminders were sent through emails to increase the number of responses. Owing to the poor response rate the sample size was reduced and contacted only the identified participants by the CEMCA.

Telephone interviews

After receiving the responses, some of the respondents were interviewed by telephone using an interview schedule (Annex 2) to get more details (at least one respondent from each institution). Each interview was lasted about 30-45 minutes.

Results and Discussion

Effectiveness of the training workshops

Responses were received from the following institutions/universities: ANDC, ANNA University, BRAOU, D.Net, CCE, KSR, NIE, OUSL, JNTU, SIET, University of Malaya, UTU, YCMOU.

All the respondents commented on the usefulness of the EasyNow techniques in teaching and learning irrespective of the discipline.

Teacher's point of view

"I have found EasyNow techniques very useful for preparing course material and other content like preparing presentations for our College to be used at various occasions. These techniques are easy to use" (One of the participant).

Student's point of view

"EASYNOW Toolkit is definitely a learner friendly learning material kit that enhances the interest in learning and act as a reinforcement component for better comprehension of the subject provided" (One of the participant).

Multimedia Developer's point of view

"Since it is (Easy Now) based on mainly open source software, institutions and individuals are not dependent on proprietary software for creation and use. The Easynow products run on diverse operating systems hence it is versatile" (One of the participant).

Media Producer's point of view

"The main component of this tool kit "easy now" is Any Video Converter which is having great features like multi format conversion and capability of combining multiple video segments into one single video file. This is a great feature that allows the user to combine files of his choice without going to editing software.

On the other side it is not able to optimise the videos straight away @ 128 kbps . When I tried to optimise the videos into 320 X 240 resolution at 128kbps rate, it is delivered @386 kbps with high quality. When I tried to re compress (optimise) it @ 128 kbps again with any video converter, it is not working properly (the setting of the frame rate of the video jumped to 1000fps by default due to its malfunction) . This situation forced the user to recompress by using another software like Windows movie maker. With the combination of both AVC and windows movie maker we can optimise the videos at any desired data rates (One of the participant).

Trainer's point of view

"Most of the products are very user friendly and can be taught easily for people with little technical skills. Since the products are open/free, it addresses the concern for the availability of fewer resources" (One of the participant).

80% of the respondents indicated that the hands-on training session and the support from the resource person during the session was adequate whereas 20% stated “somewhat adequate” indicating “not enough time” to practice, “lack of programming knowledge” and “lack of technical skills to create animations” as reasons.

70% of the respondents mentioned that the resources and facilities were adequate during the training sessions. However, 30% felt that they would have benefited more if there were given more resources on finding relevant open resources, tools and relevant web links. 30% also commented inadequate facilities at the training workshop such as low speed of the internet and continuous interruptions of the power supply during the training sessions.

Majority preferred the enriched slide shows. They felt the enriched slideshows are more attractive with video clips, and contents can be clearly illustrated using visuals. Further they can integrate audio component to enhance the production.

As teachers we often use slides, so enrichment and use would be natural and easy (One of the participants).

However, one participant from SIET indicated that the slideshows “will not allow the user to interact with it, and it is nothing more than a flash cards”. His argument was based on the evaluation surveys conducted by the institution where they found that

... e-content in the form of interactive Multimedia (learning objects) attracted the students very much as it allows them for joyful learning through its user interactivity, animations, activities audio and other elements – one of the participants from SIET.

The least preferred format was ODL and html. On the one hand ODL format is not relevant to all the participants. On the other hand most of the participants were not comfortable in using basic programming language.

The respondents from University of Malaya preferred audio format in addition to slides shows as they were using “voice over” technique to enhance their multimedia productions.

To what extent these EasyNow techniques have been helpful to the institution /participants

During the training sessions all the participants have managed to complete the workshop requirement. They have developed at least 3 deliverables as group work. Some of the motivated participants have developed individual movies in addition to the group products.

The progress of using these techniques and products after the workshop varied; from “not using” to “continuously using” and “developed new products”.

Some of the respondents have not used them afterwards. The following reasons were highlighted for poor usage.

- Lack of technical skills
 - During the training session, 2-5 participants collectively developed the multimedia production with the assistance from the media/technical staff. Therefore to develop new products, some of the academic staff members were not that competent to produce the products alone (ANDC, BRAOU, D.Net, OUSL, NIE, UTU).
- Preference for traditional lectures
 - Still some of the academics use traditional lectures and they hardly use multimedia in their teaching sessions (mainly BRAOU).

- Workload
 - At present academics are very busy with their routine academic work and allocation of time is a source of concern for additional multimedia production (BRAOU, OUSL, NIE).
- Limited resources available for Production and Delivery of the multimedia product
 - Inadequate resources to develop the products as the staff members do not have personal computers. They have to book in advance to use the resources at the computer/media laboratory (NIE). Having produced the multimedia productions, staff members have to find an alternative measure of delivering the products either as a CD or online as they do not have facilities to integrate with their teaching sessions (BRAOU, NIE). So finding financial assistance is a source of concern.
- Lack of compulsory media policy
 - Many universities do not have a media policy stating the compulsory integration of multimedia courseware (ANDC, BRAOU, OUSL, NIE). To attract academic staff to produce multimedia courseware is a challenge and need continuous commitment on part of the academic staff to prepare such formats which depends on the interest and motivation of the teacher. That may be one of the reasons for low production of multimedia courseware.
- Lack of Institutional Recognition/incentives/rewards – All the universities do not have a mechanism to offer incentives to staff who are producing multimedia courseware, however some universities have already introduced award for best multimedia production (OUSL) or planning to introduce an award (university of Malaya).

To what extent the participants use their knowledge after the training workshops

It was apparent from the findings that the regular usage of the techniques and further developments on EasyNow were attributed solely due to the personal interest of the individuals. These enthusiastic groups of individuals have used the techniques further with the assistance from the resource person, Mr V. Krishnamoorthy from CEMCA or from the technical/media staff of the institution/university and produced new products. The overall achievements were mainly:

Individual

- A few participants from each institution have shown the interest during the training sessions and retained that interest afterwards. These individuals were capable of using techniques alone and most of the time teaching computer/science related subjects or technical/media experts. They also have the facilities to use the computer (laptop/desktop at home). Thus, they regularly use EasyNow

- techniques in their teaching sessions (ANDC, D.Net, CCE, OUSL, University of Malay, YCMOU).
- A few have used these techniques to develop promotional/orientation videos for their institutions (ANDC, OUSL) which need regular updates and easily done using EasyNow techniques.
 - One or two participants have used their movies as a resource in their online courses as these products are compatible with MOODLE Learning Management System (OUSL).
 - Some participants have created their own institutional web pages and uploaded the movies created during the training sessions with the assistance received from the resource person; Mr V Krishna Moorthy (ANDC, D.Net, OUSL).
 - One participant has uploaded the resources and relevant web links in the facebook (CCE)
 - One participant telecasted a lecture series on “Electronics” using slideshows via an educational channel (OUSL).
 - One participant recorded the TV broadcasts of his live telecasts on “science in daily life” and converted to 5-10 minutes video clips using movie maker and made them available in CEMCA and YOU TUBE websites. So far 120 clips have been uploaded (<http://pandian.physics.eduframe.net>).

Institutional

- Some of the participants (academic/administrative/technical) on behalf of the institution have uploaded new movies (other than the movies developed during the workshop) to the CEMCA website (ANDC, SIET).
- Some of the participants have uploaded new multimedia productions in the university e-portal (University of Malaya).
- Some of the participants (academic/administrative/technical) have converted already existing video resources to web-based media formats and made them available on their institutional/other web sites. D.Net has completed 15 programmes on medicinal plants, 40 in progress and plan to complete 70 programmes. YCMOU has converted 40 recorded sessions on competitive exams delivered through EduSat and made them available on the web for seven months for students who have missed the live telecast. YCMOU has also converted a series of 30 video programmes on environmental science and displayed on a separate web page for free viewing and downloading for one year. In addition, the School of Computer Science, YCMOU has developed video lectures and virtual classroom modules for the Computer Programmes and are distributed to the Study Centers on CDs (protected). SIET also converted 100 existing videos and uploaded to Eduframe.net website with only 2 days of training.
- Staff members have used multimedia productions using EasyNow continuously when the subject is computer/ICT (CCE), and there is a compulsory media integration policy (SIET, University of Malaya).

- Some academic staff members who have undergone training have conducted EasyNow training workshops for their own institutions (ANDC, ANNA University, CCE, OUSL, NIE, YCMOU)
- One academic staff member has taught some of the EasyNow techniques to students (ANDC).

National/international

- Awareness sessions - A few administrators have explained the importance and usefulness of EasyNow when they represent various Boards (YCMOU- Maharashtra State Board of Secondary and Higher Secondary Education in 2011 with the aim of introducing ICT to school level education, NIE – to the Ministry of Education and training of teachers are in progress).
- Capacity building workshops on EasyNow - Some academic staff members who have undergone training have conducted EasyNow training workshops for other institutions/universities locally (ANDC, ANNA University, NIE)
- Some participants have been invited by the CEMCA to conduct international workshops on EasyNow (ANDC, ANNA University, D.Net, OUSL).

Conclusion and recommendations

All the respondents valued the importance of using EasyNow techniques in multimedia productions due to its user-friendliness, fast in creation, and free access to softwares. However, usage of these techniques by **all** the trainees was not that remarkable. Findings revealed that many reasons responsible for the low output and can be categorized into individual and institutional factors.

Individual factors

- academic workload,
- low technical and programming skills,
- inadequate time to master the techniques during the training workshop.

Institutional factors

- limited resources,
- lack of technical support,
- poor collaboration among relevant division such as IT, Media and Academic staff,
- lack of compulsory media integration policy in the university.

Since most of the institutions do not have a compulsory media integration policy, majority of participants most unlikely to use these techniques unless there is a mechanism of giving incentives.

Though a few “enthusiastic” members of many institutions have taken the initiative not only to develop many courses and using them continuously in teaching sessions but also started to disseminate these materials via the CEMCA/eduframe website or through the institutional/other web sites by their own efforts. They were the self-driven “change agents” of the institution who were not anticipating any rewards/incentives from the institution. They feel that their prime duty is to render service to the nation by empowering learners.

The institutions where formalized procedures and mechanisms for media production (as project-based with production teams) are in place, are more likely to sustain the usage. Most of these institutions have converted some of the existing videos to DVDs (NIE) or optimized and made them available online (D.Net, OUSL, SIET, University of Malay, YCMOU).

Findings also indicated that the leadership given by certain chief executive officers has directed the institution by encouraging their staff by providing more training opportunities, resources and appreciating their work in order to increase the usage of multimedia integration into their curriculum even there is no media integration policy.

The next section discusses the recommendations.

Recommendations

- *Training opportunities*
 - Regular training sessions on EasyNow with longer duration as most of the participants indicated that they did not have time to master the techniques.
 - Selection of the participants – Study revealed that the majority of participants do not use the techniques as anticipated. Therefore, it is necessary to identify the interested, capable group of people who are competent with the basic computer skills so that they can develop the course independently.
 - More training on open source software that related to courseware /e-learning as these technology change quickly over time.
 - *Expand the opportunities to other sectors* - Since EasyNow techniques are simple and easy to use, CEMCA should try to expand the training opportunities to other educational institutions including Teacher training colleges so that it *“becomes a movement and more and more teachers and students will benefit from it”* (italics – views expressed by one of the participant). Emphasis should be given to school teachers who are teaching ICT education at school level as with the introduction of ICT at school level teachers may find EasyNow techniques very useful.
- *To increase the existing situation at university/institutions level*

- Leadership is crucial and can drive the university/institution to produce multimedia productions giving adequate support, resources and time and at the same time making decisions regarding policies and mechanisms to enhance media integration into teaching and learning.
- In order to increase the production of multimedia courseware, then university/institution has to have a compulsory media integration policy where compulsory preparation of multimedia formats is necessary for all the academic staff as practiced by SIET and University of Malaya. University of Malaya is adhering to the national policy where 30% of the content must be uploaded this year and 50% next year and 70% on the third consecutive year. Media integration is a key performance indicator in the University of Malaya and all the staff members have to produce e-content and upload to the university e-portal. University had made media integration as part of their job requirement.
- CEMCA can take an initiative in forming a group/community of participants. This can be useful in sharing experiences, helping each other and for introducing new techniques, tools. All the participants get an opportunity to know the new developments and may sometime inspire the others to use the tools/techniques.
- *Technical concerns*
 - The new versions of Windows (eg. Windows 7) do not have windows movie maker. The version with pre-installation is not adequate. There is no alternative for linux users for windows movie maker.

Acknowledgements

I have to take this opportunity to thank the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA) for providing this opportunity to carry out this study.

Annex 1 - Use of Easynow toolkit – Evaluation - 2011

Dear colleague,

We are interested in your views on the usage of EASYNOW toolkit. We expect an honest opinion from you to help us check how useful this toolkit in your work. Your views will be kept confidential and anonymous. We would like to thank you in advance for lending your cooperation to us, by devoting your valuable time to complete this questionnaire.

Instructions

1. Please answer the questions by circling the relevant number or writing the suitable answer in the space (.....) provided. Circle/Tick only one box unless otherwise instructed.
2. Where necessary, write your reasons clearly.

Background Information

Q1. Name:

Q2. Gender: 1 Male 2 Female

Q3. Age group: 1 25-30 2 31-35 3 36-40 4 41-45 5 46-55 6 above 55

Q4. Institution: (please circle the institution)

| | |
|-------------------------------|----|
| D.Net -Bangladesh | 1 |
| BRAOU - India | 2 |
| IGNOU- India | 3 |
| UOU- India | 4 |
| ANDC- India | 5 |
| ANNA UNIV- India | 6 |
| YCMOU- India | 7 |
| KSR- India | 8 |
| CCE-Maldives | 9 |
| OUM - Malaysia | 10 |
| MMU - Malaysia | 11 |
| University of Malay--Malaysia | 12 |
| NIE-Sri Lanka | 13 |
| OUSL-Sri Lanka | 14 |
| Other ----- | |

Q5. How do you describe your work? (circle all that apply)

| | |
|----------------------------------|---|
| Teaching undergraduates | 1 |
| Teaching postgraduates | 2 |
| Involved in non-formal education | 3 |
| Researcher | 4 |
| Technical officer | 5 |
| Multimedia developer | 6 |
| Media Producer | 7 |
| Administrator | 8 |
| Other – please specify..... | 9 |

Usage of EASYNOW Toolkit

Q6. After the initial training on EASYNOW toolkit, what is your present situation: (circle all that apply)

| | |
|---|---|
| Not completed the products at the workshop | 1 |
| Completed the product/s but not used afterwards | 2 |
| Completed the product/s and used once in teaching sessions | 3 |
| Completed the product/s and using continuously in teaching sessions | 4 |
| Developed new products and using in teaching sessions | 5 |
| Other – please specify..... | 6 |

Q7. If you have “Not completed” or “Completed but not used”, indicate reasons.

.....

Q8. If you have “Completed and used or using”, indicate the reasons for using?

.....

Q9. What are the format/s you use? (circle all that apply)

| | |
|-------|---|
| Audio | 1 |
| Video | 2 |

| | |
|---------------------|---|
| Enriched slide show | 3 |
| Html | 4 |
| Other (pl. specify) | 5 |

Q10. What is your most preferred format and least preferred format and why?

most preferred format:

reason:.....

least preferred format:

reason:.....

Q11. Have you obtained any feedback from your learners on the preferred format/s and the usefulness?

| | | |
|--------------------|-----|----|
| | Yes | No |
| preferred format/s | | |
| usefulness | | |

Q12. If “Yes” indicate the preference/s and the reasons .

.....

.....

Learning Experience

Q13. Please fill the following table regarding the training you had on “EasyNow toolkit”.

| | Adequate | Some what adequate | Inadequate |
|--|----------|--------------------|------------|
| Hands-on-training | | | |
| Resources (Training manuals) | | | |
| Facilities/utilities (during the workshop) | | | |
| Support/guidance | | | |

Q14. If your answer is “Some what adequate” or “Inadequate”, please give reasons.

.....

.....

Q.15 What were the difficulties/problems that you experienced when designing the products?

.....

.....

Q.16. What constraints, such as Internet connection speed or computer facilities, do you face when using the products in your teaching sessions?

.....

.....

Q. 17. If there are any further comments about this toolkit which you would like to make, please use the space provided below.

.....

.....

Thank you very much for spending your valuable time and effort to complete this questionnaire.

Annex 2 - Use of Easynow toolkit – Interview Schedule

Q1. Why do you develop these courses?

Q2. What's the benefit you get?

Q3. Any incentives from the university?

Q4. Is there a media policy in the university indicating that you have to develop so many multimedia courses?

Q5. As an administrator how do you drive your teachers to develop multimedia courses with their routine academic work? What are the strategies? Any incentives for teachers?

Q6. Any comments?