Noolaham Foundation
Final Report

Project Title	Digital Library for School Students Pilot Project
Project Number	NF/PG/2012/0003
Project Locations	Jaffna, Trincomalee and Colombo
Sector	Virtual learning environment - Educational Resources
Implementing agency and contribution	Noolaham Foundation
Grant Agency and Contribution	Noolaham Foundation
Total Budget and Expenditure	Not Recorded
Project Period	October 2012 – September 2013
Responsible Stakeholders	Volunteers of the Noolaham Foundation, Department of Education, Northern Province Various Zonal Education offices and School teachers

Summary

The **Digital Library for School Students Pilot Project** was carried out by Noolaham Foundation in 2012/2013 to create open access digital library for the Sri Lankan Tamil speaking students and educators. This project was aimed at digitizing educational materials. It was the first step taken by the Foundation towards establishing virtual learning platforms for the Tamil speaking students in Sri Lanka through its Pallikoodam Program. It is an educational initiative of Noolaham Foundation that aims at creating an alternative, community-centered educational system among the Tamil speaking communities in Sri Lanka.

Through this project 500 G.C.E advanced level and ordinary level exam papers were digitized and made available online at Noolaham Foundation's Pallikoodam Program website at www.epallikoodam.org. Events were conducted at four schools to introduce the Pallikoodam Program as well as Noolaham Digital Library. The Education Department of Northern Province, four zonal Education departments and 11 schools contributed towards this project. This initiative was a massive success and special appreciation came from school teachers and students.

Introduction and Background

In the 21st century educational qualification is not an optional one but has become a necessary one. According to the student community in Sri Lanka, from grade one to grade thirteen, they have enough chances to improve their studies and extra-curricular activities through the opportunities provided by their schools. The schools pave the way for students to develop their skills and attitudes. At the school level students' knowledge and skills are evaluated through cumulative assessments, assignments, practicals and projects. During the school period students face several challenges. Therefore school students have to be prepared so that they can face these challenges and do well in the exams, and move to the next stage.

General Certificate of Education in Ordinary level (G.C.E O/L) and General Certificate of Education in Advanced Level (G.C.E A/L) are two milestones in the educational quest of most students who come from Sri Lankan Tamil community. G.C.E O/L and G.C.E A/L exams are usually conducted by the department of examinations of the ministry of education. G.C.E A/L exam is an important exam that decides whether a student can enter Sri Lanka's state universities. This exam is   conducted in Tamil, English and Sinhala Medium. But importantly two years of advanced level play a vital role in the life of the student community in Sri Lanka. Those who obtain the   good results in advanced level exams can follow free university education.

NF's Pallikoodam program aims at presenting a virtual learning environment, where all the streams of studies can be followed by Tamil speaking students in Sri Lanka. Additionally, the program targets to introduce informal education systems and methodologies. Building a virtual learning environment with open and free access seems to have an impact on the targeted beneficiaries as a group of intellectuals can coordinate through interactive learning. In its broadest sense, e-assessment and e-learning enable the use of information technology for any subject-related activity.

Pallikoodam Program aims at supporting self-practice and contain many subject related documents such as Mathematics, History, Science and Technology for grade six to Advanced Level students. The virtual learning environments made possible by emerging internet based educational technology provides a great cost-effective opportunity to bring and link quality educational resources to school students. It helps a student who has access to the Internet to pursue his/her studies from anywhere and anytime. Virtual Learning will help those who are in need of self-learning and those want to share their knowledge through the Internet.

Objectives and Achievements

It is vital to have a reference library for any learning environment. Thus, Pallikoodam decided to create a digital library for VLE. Digital library has to be capable of providing students with the information/references they require in order to pursue their courses. The objectives of this project were to bring text based educational resources (G.C.E advanced level and ordinary level exam papers, model papers) to an online platform and to make them accessible to students. For the students to access the contents easily, the sources included in the library will be cataloged on the basis of grades and subjects. The digital library will consist of publications by the Department of Education, Sri Lanka such syllabi, teachers' guides, textbooks and model/past exam papers. This digital library could be accessed by all the participants who are online. There are no privileges or restrictions.

This project was implemented at the following stages:

1. Identifying relevant and suitable documents that should be digitized
2. Digitizing the documents identified
3. Mapping digitized documents to the syllabi
4. Identifying available existing electronic materials to supplement student learning
5. Implementing an open digital library using digitized content

Initially this project was started as two separate projects (digital library for advanced level students and digital library for ordinary level students) but then was implemented as one. Two project officers were assigned for scanning. All other activities are carried out by volunteers, mainly university students. These volunteers have approached schools, private institutions, individuals and education departments to identify, locate and collect educational resources.

The following organizations helped us in this project by providing permission and materials for reference library.

Zonal / Provincial Educational Departments
1. Northern Province Education Department
2. Zonal Education Department, Jaffna zone, Jaffna.
3. Zonal Education Department, Islands zone, Jaffna.
4. Zonal Education Department, Thenmaradchi zone, Jaffna.
5. Zonal Education Department, Valikaamam zone, Jaffna.

Schools
1. Kokuvil Hindu College, Jaffna.
2. Jaffna Hindu College, Jaffna.
3. Vaddu Hindu College, Jaffna.
4. Stanley College, Jaffna.
5. Hartley College, Jaffna.
6. Karaveddy Vickneswara College, Jaffna.
7. Nelliady Central College, Jaffna.
8. St.John's College, Jaffna.
9. Jaffna Central College, Jaffna.
10. Koneswara Hindu College, Trincomalee.
11. BadullaSaraswathy National College, Badulla.
12. Banderawela Tamil Central College, Badulla.

More than 500 different kinds of exam papers, model papers and tutorials were identified, collected and digitized through this project. All the digitized educational resources were made available online through Noolaham Foundation's Pallikoodam program's learning platform of epallikoodam.org to students. The student can download them for free of charge from anywhere and anytime. The digitized documents are classified subject wise and displayed as Islam, Tamil, History, Geography, English, Drama and Theater, Christianity, Carnatic Music, Political Science, Scientific method and Logic, Home Science, Hinduism, Hindu Culture, Information and Technology, Bharatanatyam, Drawing, Economics, Business Studies, Accounts, Chemistry, Physics and Bio Science.

Noolaham Foundation actively participates in awareness creation campaigns about this project. Noolaham Foundation conducted four seminars on this initiative for the benefit of various schools. The seminars were conducted at Urumpirai Hindu College, Columbuthurai Hindu MahaVidyalayam in Jaffna and Ramanathan Hindu Ladies College, Saiva Mangaiyar Kalagam in Colombo. , NF's volunteers were deeply involved in the seminars. These volunteers came from various universities such as University of Peradeniya, Moratuwa and Colombo. Principals, vice principals, teachers and students actively participated in the seminars.

Constrains and Lessons learned

- As NF expected, the tasks of clustering the documents and collecting meta data, proof reading and categorizing during the digitization and web hosting process were time consuming
- Normally state-run secondary schools get 20 - 30 computers for their lab users, but some rural schools don't have those facilities. That is why students can't frequently access this technology for their educational development.

Suggestions and Recommendations

- It is strongly recommended Noolaham Foundation conduct awareness creation campaigns in the future for appropriate students. Noolaham Foundation found that conducting the awareness creation campaign enhanced the skills, attitudes and knowledge of students improved. It will be a great opportunity for gifted students to advance further.
- Adequate budget and human resources to enable quality evaluation and reporting will help in future planning. The use of evaluations report for strategic decision making such as planning and organizing the project in the near future can help effective implementation.
- To get official permission from the zonal education office and school principals to conduct awareness creation campaigns were not a big deal as most of the officials welcomed these services.