



REFLECTIONS ON EDUCATIONAL AUDIO PRODUCTION WORKSHOPS CONDUCTED BY THE OPEN UNIVERSITY OF SRI LANKA IN 2020- 2021

*Dinithi Uthpala Ranasinghe**

The Centre for Educational Technology and Media, The Open University of Sri Lanka

INTRODUCTION

Thomas (2001) shows in his work titled ‘Audio for Distance Education and Open Learning’ that audio plays a vital role in Open and Distance Learning (ODL). Makina (2020) also highlights the importance of integrating audio in an ODL environment. She states that audio reduces transactional distance through providing quality educational opportunities and access to information through any digital device. Thomas (2001) further mentions that audio can bring to the learner the sounds of people and places; the sounds of real and imagined situations; sounds designed to stimulate, support, illustrate, and enrich the learning process. Most Distance Education and Open Learning institutions, particularly in their more formal courses, rely on printed texts as their main medium of communication for teaching and learning. However, the use of printed texts imposes several limitations on both teachers and learners. For instance, from the teacher’s point of view, although printed texts can teach most subjects, there are some subjects that are either very difficult or in some cases, almost impossible, to teach effectively using print on its own (Thomas, 2001, p.3). It is difficult to explain personal experience and human interaction, teaching subjects involving attitudes, beliefs and values, offering students the experience of the sounds and sights of places and situations with which they are not familiar (Thomas, 2001, p.3). Hence, the importance of audio in an ODL environment cannot be underestimated.

The Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL) is unique within the Sri Lankan national university system for being the only university to offer study programs through the Open and Distance Mode of Learning (ODL). The Centre for Educational Technology and Media (CETMe) of the OUSL acts as a service provider for all Faculties of the university to develop their courses and assure the quality of ODL course materials in numerous ways including conducting various training workshops. The CETMe is equipped with a high-end audio studio and there is a technical staff to assist with audio productions. Two training workshops on educational audio production were conducted by the CETMe for the OUSL academic staff in 2020 and 2021. They were conducted as hands-on sessions in face-to-face mode. It was expected that the participants would be able to describe the qualities required of a radio producer, explain the main elements of radio production, distinguish between three different types of microphones, identify music and sound effects for radio production, classify the different stages of radio programme production, state the importance of a script in a radio programme and produce an educational audio production that can be integrated with their courses delivered in ODL context, at the end of the workshop.

The aim of this paper is to examine the reflections of the participants on the educational audio production workshops conducted by the CETMe in 2020 and 2021. The study consisted of the following research questions.

RQ1: What were the factors that persuaded participants to take part in the workshops?

RQ2: What were the participants’ reflections on integrating educational audio productions with the courses in the ODL context?

RQ3: How did the participants deploy the knowledge acquired through the workshops for the development of their courses in the ODL context?

RQ4: What were the suggestions to improve the quality of educational audio production workshops



conducted by the OUSL in the future?

Processes of reflection are inseparably linked to processes of professionalization. (Peitz et. al, 2021). Reflection is associated therefore with “looking back” and examining the past to learn from what happened and perhaps not repeat mistakes. However, it is also increasingly associated with reflecting on action and encourages an exploring of thoughts and feelings; looking for insights; and maximizing self-awareness which all tie the process closely to identity formation (Helyer, 2015). Schön (1983) further developed the notion of reflection with the concepts of reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. Reflection-in-action takes place during an action, and reflection-on-action takes place after an event has occurred (Olteanu, 2017). Among them, this research deploys reflection-on-action. Accordingly, research on reflection is very useful to identify the accomplishments and drawbacks of the workshops and to enhance the effectiveness of the workshops in the future.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research design to collect data since the main objective of the research is to examine the individual’s reflections on educational audio production workshops. The collected data were analyzed thematically, and then quantified and presented in tables to present the results. Twenty-six participated in the workshops and it was assumed that only those who have placed their signatures in the attendance sheets participated in the workshops. The data presentation is based on that. A sample of the workshop-participants (n=20) were interviewed to collect data to address the research questions mentioned above. The sample comprised of temporary lecturers (11%), probationary lecturers (50%), and senior lecturers (39%) who are attached to the Faculties of Education, Humanities and Social Sciences, Health Sciences, Natural Sciences, and Management Studies. In-depth interviews were deployed in this research as they help to reveal detailed information about a person’s thoughts, interpretations, perceptions and behaviours in depth. Moreover, in-depth interviews are often used to provide context to other data (such as outcome data), offering a more complete picture of what happened in the program and why (Boyce and Neale, 2006, p.3). The interviews consisted of both open-ended and close-ended questions and the interviews were conducted either by meeting them physically or via telephone calls.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RQ1: What were the factors that persuaded participants to take part in the workshops?

The participants described the factors and their own experiences that persuaded them to participate in the workshops. Some of them stated more than one reason for their participation. Table 1 demonstrates the data collected regarding RQ1.

Table 1: Factors caused to participate in the workshops

Code	Factor	Percentage (%)
RQ1-1a	Because nominated by the department	100
RQ1-1b	Because not having any prior knowledge	35
RQ1-1c	To update existing knowledge	13
RQ1-1d	Because of personal interest in the subject	90
RQ1-1e	Other	20

Being nominated by their respective departments was one of the main reasons for everyone to take part in the workshops. Thirty-five percent of the participants mentioned that they decided to participate in the workshop as they did not have any prior knowledge about the educational audio



production process or how to use the microphones and other technical instruments properly for a recording. Some participants had already learnt about the audio productions but they have participated in the workshops with the intention of updating their existing knowledge. Among them, there was a participant who had already had practical working experiences in several radio stations but he had participated in the workshop with the intention of identifying how ODL mode benefits from educational audio productions. He further mentioned that he wished to identify the facilities offered by the CETMe regarding educational audio productions. Some of the participants stated that they participated in the workshop because of the interest in the resource person. Moreover, they mentioned that they had already known that the resource person conducts lectures and workshops impressively.

RQ2: What were the participants' reflections on integrating educational audio productions with the courses in the ODL context?

A hundred percent of the participants mentioned that integrating educational audio productions with their courses is useful and important. The majority of the participants expressed that keeping students' attention and, keeping them involved in the lessons are challenging in an ODL context so that using educational audio productions would be an advisable method to keep the students' attention and involvement. They also mentioned that there are auditory learners and they are bored by reading and understanding texts often and so audio productions should be integrated with the courses. A lecturer who represented the Department of Special Needs Education emphasized the usefulness of educational audio programmes for blind students. Graw (2009) also reveals the importance of using audio to support Distance Education. Meanwhile, some mentioned that philosophically it is important to integrate audio productions with their courses but practically it is challenging because the time-consuming nature of the production process. They further mentioned that it takes time to find resource persons, write scripts, practice, record, and follow procedures to book the studio and to get the necessary technical assistance.

RQ3: How did the participants deploy the knowledge acquired through the workshops for the development of their courses in the ODL context?

The workshop-participants were informed to produce an educational audio production at the end of the workshop but only 15% of the participants had produced audio programmes. Among them, a lecturer attached to the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences mentioned that she produced two educational audio programmes after participating in the training workshop and a few questions were asked from the students based on the contents of the audio productions. She further mentioned that the students were also interested in listening to them. Another participant who is attached to the Faculty of Education stated that he produced a podcast for the B.Ed in Drama and Theatre programme, after participating in the workshop. He further stated that a programme like Drama and Theatre cannot be offered only by using the texts so that audio productions play a vital role there. Eighty-eight percent of the participants stated that they used the knowledge gained at the workshops when they were conducting day-schools, though they were unable to produce educational audio productions. The participants further mentioned that they were aware of voice modulation, the importance of keeping poses while speaking, the importance of preparation, and the ways of using the microphones accurately at the workshops. The following table referred to the participants' reflections on the knowledge acquired at the workshops.



Table 2: Reflections on the awareness acquired through the workshops

Interviewee	Supportive Quotation
A	“Due to my busyness, I could not produce any educational audio production related to my subject after participating in the workshop, but I want to do a production soon. I learned how to deliver content creatively at the workshop and I am now trying to deliver my day school lectures creatively”.
B	“The workshop was very useful to me, and I produced several short educational audio programmes and integrated them with my courses”.

RQ4: What are the suggestions to improve the quality of educational audio production workshops in the future?

According to the data, the suggestions made by the participants to improve the quality of future-workshops are as follows.

Table 3: Suggestions to improve the quality of educational audio production workshops in the future

Code	Suggestion	Percentage
RQ4-1	Expand the duration allocated for the workshops/conduct a series of workshops	100
RQ4-2	Expand the time allocated to train on audio scriptwriting	85
RQ4-3	Provide more opportunities for practicing/ practical sessions	80
RQ4-4	Provide learning aids (hand-outs/ppts)	15

As shown in Table 3, the workshop duration should be expanded in the future so that there will be sufficient opportunities to be familiar with the environment and instruments in the audio studio. Data collected under RQ3 reveals that 85% of the participants have not produced any educational audio production after participating in the workshops, and among them, 40% mentioned that they were unable to proceed with the productions because of the lack of awareness of writing respective audio scripts. Thomas (2001) also explains audio scriptwriting needs to be trained and practiced. Therefore, it seems that more opportunities should be provided for the participants to practice scriptwriting. The majority of the participants stated that the time allocated to train them on scriptwriting was inadequate at the workshops and it should be expanded. Most of the participants (80%) also stated that it will be very useful if they were given more opportunities to be familiar with the microphones and other instruments used for recordings. They further stated that though they have practiced a script, they lose the confidence and feel embarrassed when they were getting ready for a recording. Therefore, more opportunities should be provided for practising. However, the whole study sample suggested continuing conducting workshops on educational audio productions in the future too.

CONCLUSIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

The analysis has revealed that the audio production workshops should be continued in the future too and the measures should be taken to enhance the effectiveness of the workshops. The majority of the participants have joined the workshops to grasp new knowledge and /or update their awareness on educational audio productions. The resource person was also a decisive factor to motivate individuals to participate in the workshop. All participants are in the view of integrating educational audio productions with their courses helps to enhance the quality of the courses in the ODL context but some of them were concerned about the time-consuming aspect of educational audio production procedure compared to producing reading materials. Unlike in a conventional



university context, keeping students' attention and involvement into the lessons in an ODL context is challenging. Hence, providing only printed material for their studies is insufficient. The course developers should also be concerned about auditory learners and those who are facing vision impairments. Integrating educational audio productions with the courses offered in the ODL context will be a proper alternation for them. It was reported that 40% of the participants of those who did not produce educational audio productions were not able to proceed due to the difficulty of writing the scripts. It is therefore suggested to follow up on the progress of audio productions in different stages by the CETMe. The findings also show that the workshops have helped the capacity building of the participants though most of them were unable to produce educational audio productions after participating in the workshops. It was found that there is a shortage of research that examine the impact and reflections of the participants after conducting training workshops, but it is essential for the future development of the workshops. Therefore, it is expected that these research findings will help to assure the quality and output of the training workshops conducted by the OUSL in the future.

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