DEVELOPMENT OF AN INTERACTIVE MULTIMEDIA DATABASE ON ORCHIDS

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Orchid is an important cut-flower grown in Sri Lanka. Although it is a highly profitable agribusiness, the potential income from Orchid cultivation is not realized both locally and internationally. One main reason for that is the poor knowledge and skills related to the correct technology of cultivating Orchids. In addition, effective information sources are not available for the local growers. Interactive multimedia (IMM) databases which contain different video clips, photographs, diagrams, sound, and text together in an interactive manner are effective means of disseminating such knowledge. It is an electronic book in which the users can go back and forth to the different pages at will.

The objective of this project was to develop an IMM database to disseminate information on cultivating orchids to beginners. The IMM development process includes identifying of information needs, content outlining, flow charting and branching, writing story boards, producing media elements, authoring and pre-testing.

The information need identification was carried out using a questionnaire survey among the trainees attending orchid training programs at the Royal Botanical Garden. The content outlining was done considering the results of the survey together with the opinion of the experts. Subsequently flowcharting and branching were undertaken and the different aspects of Orchid cultivation were explained under six main chapters as Introduction, Varieties, Propagation, Cultivation, Harvest, and Pests and Diseases. To highlight important points and to improve interactivity questions and answers and also local research papers available on Orchids were added as separate chapters. The production of different media elements was undertaken in collaboration with the Audio Visual Center and Royal Botanical Gardens of the Department of Agriculture. Eight video clips were produced to explain processes *i.e.* potting of different varieties, sexual and asexual propagation and aftercare. In addition, 70 photographs, diagrams, graphics and descriptive texts were produced and included. The facility to get printouts of any page in the IMM database was also included.

Finally pre-testing of the product using a group of university students studying Agricultural Journalism, graphic designers and subject matter specialists was undertaken. Using their comments, improvements were made to the product. The IMM database is available in the form of a CD. It is a convenient method of accessing the information at a low cost. The explanations in IMM database were presented in Sinhalese and English. The IMM database is to be distributed to various agricultural extension and training institutes mainly Agrarian Service Centres and educational institutes in Sri Lanka. It is recommended that a proper evaluation of the product with the actual users be undertaken to make further improvements.