Review of A-VIEW 3.5 software

A-VIEW (Amrita Virtual Interactive E-learning World) Classroom 3.5
URL: http://aview.in
Developed by Amrita Vishwa Vidhyapeetham (India) in 2009

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Online education, though not a new phenomenon, has seen many new developments in past few years. Various online learning platforms are available which facilitate the teaching-learning process. They have the power to break the geographical walls between learners and educators and also give access to the best educators across globe. In this paper we are reviewing the A-VIEW virtual classroom software from the point of view of a presenter as well as a learner.

A-VIEW (Amrita Virtual Interactive e-Learning World) is a multi-modal, multimedia e-learning virtual classroom platform that provides an immersive e-learning experience that is almost as good as a real classroom experience. It has been developed by Amrita e-Learning Research Lab which is a part of Amrita Vishwa Vidhyapeetham situated in the State of Kerala in India. Educators across the world can use A-VIEW to deliver their content online using various features of A-VIEW. It can be used by anyone, from anywhere and at anytime.

A-VIEW is part of *Talk to a Teacher* program coordinated by Indian Institute of Technology-Bombay (IIT-B) and funded by the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) under the Indian Government's National Mission for Education using Information and Communication Technology (NME-ICT). A-VIEW is deployed at several IIT's and other leading educational institutions across the nation. A-VIEW Classroom is a framework that provides a rich interactive social environment for e-Learning. It is a simple to use, user friendly video conferencing software, which provides a great opportunity to a teacher to teach in a live interactive mode to learners spread across various geographical locations around the globe. It also provides opportunity to connect several universities together and create virtual world for learners. It acts as a Knowledge Cafe where learners can discuss/chat about the lecture even after the live class.

A-VIEW is compatible with various operating systems like Windows, Mac, iOS platform, Android Phones and also with Tablets and iPads, thus enabling learning on the move.

The following are some of the features of the *A-VIEW Classroom*:

- Conduct-Record-Edit: Conduct of live classes with recording facility to allow learners to playback the classes after the class is over. The moderator can also edit the video of a recorded class, embed another video to the existing video.
- Multiple facilitator-learner interaction using video and chat (including individual chat) sessions.
- Multi viewer interaction.
- The learners can be divided into groups and group discussion/activity can be conducted in a live classroom.
- All file types, applications/software can be shared using the 'Document sharing' and 'Application-tion sharing' option. Document sharing has enhanced features like thumbnails for documents, annotation tools, document download option for viewers, central repository and document upload.

- Content can be displayed across multiple displays using multiple windows option while logging in, enabling a rich viewing experience.
- An interactive whiteboard with various tools like text box, pen tool, line tool, geometrical shapes, eraser and highlighter is available. The whiteboard is expandable to full width of the screen.
- A few inbuilt 2D, 3D animated objects are available. Any 2D, 3D animation/objects (f3d and dae format) can be uploaded and used by the presenter.
- Video sharing option allows the teacher to share live video from say Youtube or also play any video (mp4/ flv/f4v format) which is already uploaded in the library.
- There is a face recognition facility, using which learners can make their biometric login. This feature introduces a new level of security to the application. The user will have to first register his/her face through the application and during login the user can authenticate their login through the face recognition option.
- During the online class, learners can ask their questions using the Question interface option. The class can also vote for the questions asked which helps the teacher to prioritise which question to be answered first.
- A question bank of multiple choice questions type can be created, based on which a quiz can be created for a live class. The results of the quiz are also available after the quiz is over.
- A poll can be conducted in a live class by the teacher. This feature is used to get feedback of the participants during a live class.
- Chat option allows users to chat with the presenter/other users. The moderator has the control of disabling the chat option to all users.

It is because of its wide usefulness in the area of open and distance learning that A-VIEW received the Jury Award for the best innovation in Open and Distance Learning under Higher Education Category in World Education Summit, July 2011. The Computer World Magazine (USA) recognized Amrita E-Learning Research Lab with Computer World Honours Laureate 2012 under the Training and Education category for developing A-VIEW in June 2012. In September 2012, at the Indo-Global Educational Summit and Expo, A-VIEW was awarded for Educational Excellence in the field of Educational Technology.

A-VIEW organises weekly discussions for all its users every Thursday. Topics cover the entire spectrum of Higher Education.

By introducing A-VIEW to schools, the Amrita University hopes to enhance the quality of school education across India. For colleges, A-VIEW was successfully used to train around 14,000 teachers online simultaneously across India. The scalability of A-VIEW can be effectively used for addressing the shortage of teachers in schools. Training for 10,000 engineering college teachers from across the country was conducted leveraging the broadband network and ICT tools. This training programme was conducted through 168 remote centres located all across India. The lectures in this course were delivered from IIT Bombay by Professors of IIT Bombay and IIT Madras. More and more Universities and Colleges have started exploring the features of A-VIEW for their online courses/conferences and also as a supplementary teaching tool to the existing face-to-face classroom teaching. The University of Mumbai's Institute of Distance and Open Learning has also started its two programs recently through A-VIEW.

One major weakness, in spite of all these positive features, is the downloading and installing part of the software. In comparison to other similar virtual classroom environments where the virtual classroom is accessed by a web link, for A-VIEW one needs to download the software. Another problem is the dependency on the A-VIEW team to actually conduct a course/class online. One

needs to inform the A-VIEW team about the course so that the servers are allocated to that course/class for that specific period and time. A-VIEW should automatically do this at their end in order to simplify the organising and conduct of an online course/class. The minimum 1 mbps bandwidth for running A-VIEW is one more weakness, especially at remote places where the internet connectivity is not yet strong.

Keeping in mind the scalability of the use of A-VIEW for primary, secondary or higher education including the usefulness in the area of Open and Distance Learning, A-VIEW stands out unique amongst its competitors in the field of Educational Technology. More and more Universities/Colleges/Schools should explore A-VIEW and give a positive feedback for its improvement to make Education reach to all and from highly qualified educators spread across the globe.