A review of the Tandberg Elice (Sanako Lab 100) system

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Abstract

A review of the Tandberg Elice (Sanako Lab 100) system. The Elice is a virtual cassette lab with one computer for the teacher and a virtual cassette deck for each student. The system is especially attractive for institutions that administer AP language exams.

Review

Veteran language teachers (and audiophiles) are quite familiar with the Tandberg brand. For many years Tandberg has been manufacturing and marketing high fidelity audio equipment and language labs. The company is now based in Finland, a country well known for its expertise in telecommunications. Over 30 percent of all cell phones in the US are manufactured by Nokia in Finland. (PC World, December 8, 2003: *http://www.pcworld.com/news/article/0,aid,113788,00.asp*) Therefore it comes as no surprise that Tandberg continues to deliver high quality language lab solutions. This review will discuss the features of the new Elice (also known as Sanako Lab 100) system. The system consists of a Master Storage Unit, a Control Unit, and a Main Computer (Windows XP). Each student station is a control panel that acts as a virtual cassette recorder. The student stations are well designed: They resemble cassette players, but the students do not need cassette tapes to listen. Most of the audio (up to 120 hours standard, up-gradable to 240 hours) is stored as WAV files in the Master Storage Unit, which is a large audio server storage unit. Student recordings can be collected and saved on the Main Computer as MP3 files and then burned to CD-R or transferred via a network connection or external storage device. (WAV files are the standard audio format for commercial CD's. MP3's are a compressed version of a WAV file.) Setup and installation of the system was only a little more complicated than for a

home computer system (though a professional installation is recommended for a permanent lab). Once all of the proper cable connections were made, the system booted up and functioned flawlessly. The Main Computer (a standard Windows PC with the XP operating system) had the Lab 100 software installed. The software ran perfectly and was tested by students and professors in our lab for over a month. The interface is very intuitive and requires minimal training for professors, students, and student assistants. As seen in Figure 1, the main control screen provides the following options: Menu, Seating Plan, Attendance, New Session, All Call, Recorder Status, Help, and icons to minimize or close the application.
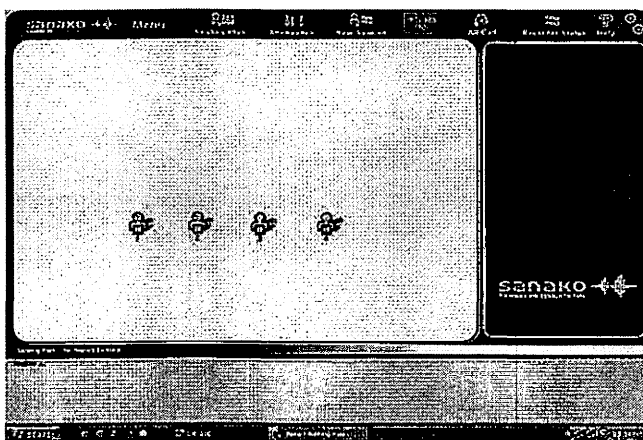

Figure 1 - Start.jpg

• The Main menu allows the user to copy files to and from the Master Storage Unit, to check on system usage, to shut down the system, and to set the interface to any of the following languages: Brazilian Portuguese, Chinese, English, Finnish, French, German, Indonesian, Italian, Norwegian, Spanish, or Thai. Most teachers in the US will leave the system in English, but some may prefer to work in their native language. Additionally, the system will have international appeal.

• The Seating Plan and Attendance options allows teachers to assign seats for a lab class that meets on a regular basis and take attendance at the beginning of class. The advantage of

this option is that the student icons in the software have names instead of numbers.

• The All Call option allows the teacher to make an announcement to all students in the lab.

• Recorder Status lets the teacher see what individual students are working on.

• The Help option offers topics covering all features of the system.

The New Session menu shows most of the features and functions of the Lab 100:
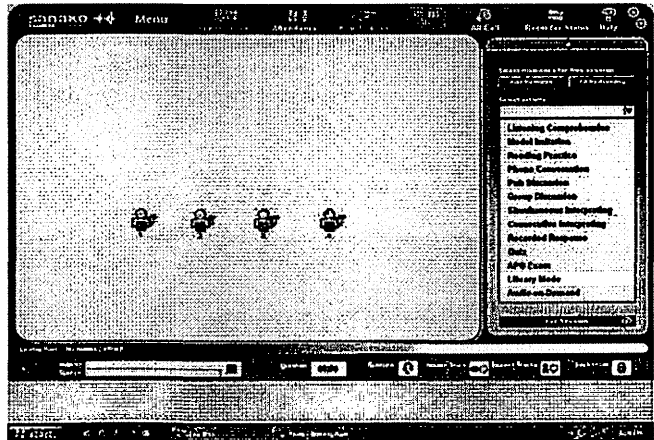

Figure 2 - Library.jpg

• Listening Comprehension allows the teacher to play or read a passage to all students. After listening once, the teacher can click on the "Free" icon and let students listen to the passage as many times as they wish.

• Model Imitation works in a similar fashion, but the students can also record to the student track of the virtual cassette recording.

• Reading Practice allows students to record their voice from a prepared printed text (or on a given topic.)

• Phone Conversations allows students to dial up other stations on their numeric keypad and simulate telephone situations.

• Pair Discussion allows students to talk in pairs through the headsets in chosen or random configuration.

• Group Discussion allows students to talk in small groups through the headsets.

• Simultaneous and Consecutive Interpreting allow students to practice oral interpretation.

• Recorded Response allows teachers to ask questions (or play a tape with questions) and record the students' answers.

• Quiz mode allows for true/false and multiple choice activities: The students use their numeric keypads to select the correct answers.

• AP Exam is specifically designed to administer advanced placement tests. Students recorded responses are collected as MP3's and saved on CD-R for submission to ETS.

• Library Mode allows students to listen to any recording in the collection. The recording must be assigned to the student from the Main Computer. Someone trained in operation of the system has to monitor the lab in this case.

• Audio-on-Demand allows students to use the numeric keypad to select a program in an open lab situation.

• S'udent recordings can be collected from all of these modes except Listening Comprehension, Phone, Pair, and Group discussion, and the Quiz mode.

The quality of the recordings is good. Likewise, the sound quality from the Master Storage Unit is excellent. The system can be connected to any audio source: a cassette deck, a CD player, an iPod, streaming internet audio, the audio track from videotape or DVD, or the teacher's microphone. The headsets and microphones are the same rugged, dependable 200 Ohm units that Tandberg has used in their lab systems for many years. Special desks are available with the Lab 100

that allow the student units to fold away when they are not in use: This allows teachers to also use the lab as traditional teaching space.

For anyone planning a new language lab on a tight budget, the Elice (Sanako Lab 100) is a good solution for the audio component of the lab. It is especially attractive for schools that administer the AP test every year. Rather than putting a computer at every student desk, the lab works with one computer for the teacher and virtual cassette decks for each student. The equipment cost is about half of what we paid in 1997 for a comparable cassette lab. Combined with an internet connection plus data and video projection, the system would meet most of the needs of a college or secondary language lab at a reasonable cost.

More information and photos are available at the Tandberg web site (*http://www.tandberg-us.com*). ✦

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