



SOME ADVANTAGES OF E-LEARNING IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TRAINING

V. Nedeva*, Em. Dimova

Technical College – Yambol, branch of Trakia University, Stara Zagora, Bulgaria

ABSTRACT

The report presents the advantages of e-learning and the use of multimedia programs and products in the “English as foreign language” education, when compared to the traditional education. An already established and running virtual learning environment – namely eDuTK (<http://tk.uni-sz.bg/edutk/>), based on the MOODLE software, is being used in Technical College – Yambol. The opportunities of e-learning and the specific advantages of the software packet HotPotatoes and Audacity have been described. The advantages of the use of the presented multimedia products have been analyzed.

Key words: e-learning, English language training, student education, software, MOODLE, HotPotatoes, Audacity.

INTRODUCTION

E-learning stands for education via the Internet, network, or standalone computer. E-learning is essentially the network-enabled transfer of skills and knowledge. It refers to using electronic applications and processes to learn. These applications and processes include Web-based learning, computer-based learning, virtual classrooms and digital collaboration. The content, to be studied, is delivered via the Internet, intranet/extranet, audio or video tape, satellite TV, and CD-ROM.

The American Society for Training and Development defines e-learning as a broad set of applications and processes which include web-based learning, computer-based learning, virtual classrooms, and digital contents. The definition of e-learning varies depending on the organization and how it is used, but basically it involves electronic means of communication, education, and training (1).

The learning process is facilitated by us of digital tools and contents. Typically, it involves some form of interactivity, which may include online interaction between the learner and their teacher.

E-learning can be conducted solely through on-line applications. Blended e-learning includes elements of web interaction and in-person interaction. If distance is not a factor, some face-to-face communication can be included to create blended e-learning.

Technology broadens the definition of face-to-face as currently two way video and two way audio could be used. Introducing these elements of participation creates a blended e-learning experience. Synchronous education means that real-time communication is implemented, such as video conferencing, teleconferencing, and on-line chat programs. Asynchronous education indicates that other means of communication are utilized that do not require real time responses. Examples of asynchronous e-learning tools include: e-mail, list serves, threaded discussions, blogs, wiki and on-line forums.

E-learning also offers individualized instruction, which printed media cannot provide, and instructor-led courses and could sometimes be quite expensive. In conjunction with assessing needs, e-learning can target specific needs. And by using learning style tests, e-learning can locate and target individual learning preferences. Additionally, synchronous e-learning is self-placed. Advanced learners are allowed to speed through or bypass instruction that is redundant

*Correspondence to: V. Nedeva, Technical College – Yambol, 38 Graf Ignatiev Str, 8600 Yambol, Bulgaria, vnedeva@tk.uni-sz.bg

while novices slow their own progress through content, eliminating frustration with themselves, their fellow learners, and the course they are taking.

Learning Management System (LMS) is basically a software application for the administration, documentation, tracking, and reporting of training programs, classroom and online events, e-learning programs, and training content. It is also popular as a web-based technology which is used to plan, implement and assess a specific learning process. The system not only manages the training and educational records, but it distributes them as well.

The benefits of LMS range from managing training and maintaining educational records to distributing courses over the Internet with features for online collaboration. It is widely used in the corporate world to automate record-keeping and employee registration (2).

The MOODLE course management system is an open source system that educators can use to create online courses. Since 1999, when it was set up, the MOODLE community has grown so much that by May 2010 there are about 48882 active sites (and that accounts only for registered users), which have been registered in 211 countries. (In February 2006 there were about 75 000 MOODLE sites, available in more than 138 countries and in 85 languages (3). The system works under Linux, UNIX and Windows operation systems; Apache web server, MySQL database and PHP language.

MOODLE is a software package designed to help educators in creating easily high-grade online courses. Such e-learning systems are sometimes called Learning Management Systems or Virtual Learning Environments also.

The word MOODLE was originally an acronym for Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment (MOODLE), which is mostly useful to programmers and education theorists.

The MOODLE is designed and developed based on particular philosophy, namely "social constructionist pedagogy". Knowledge is strengthened if the student can use it successfully in his wider environment. Students are not just a memory bank passively absorbing information, nor can knowledge be

"transmitted" to them just by reading something or listening to someone (4).

MOODLE can be used to integrate a school course for young people, with online activities that could help them increase their foreign language proficiency.

Theoretical and Experimental details

Some of the advantages of VLE or CMS applications are indisputable and obvious. They are based on the possibilities of these types of systems. In the paper there are discussed advantages of English training for student education only, not for lecturers and educational organizations.

The general advantages of e-learning in different courses can be summarized as follows (5): The students can study anywhere as long as there have access to a computer with internet connection; there is a learners' flexibility to join discussions during any time of the day; the students can work at their own place; they can accommodate to different learning styles using different activities.

Collaborative learning is other side of the advantages of e-learning. The educators can use the advantages of the sites offering courses in learning English for free - there are courses for beginners, for both adults and children, as well as more advanced courses for those who work their way up through the lessons. The advanced lessons are also suitable for those who know the basics of the English language and want to increase their reading and writing skills. The benefit of free courses is that the learner can participate at his own leisure and do not have to attend actual classes, but instead he could take the lessons and do the exercise while keeping with his personal schedule.

When students learn English for free, it is important that they enjoy the experience. This means they should take advantage of the fun activities available on the site to aid to the learning process. Adult learners will enjoy the easy pace of the lessons that begin with easier concepts and realistic situations, such as topics that include how to introduce yourself and carry on a short conversation about a variety of topics.

Many people have the idea that learning English is a difficult process. In fact, the opposite is true and the language is really easy to learn. They should proceed in small steps and learn from their own mistakes. Mistakes should be viewed as a learning experience in

which you learn what NOT to do, and what is the correct structure of sentences as well as the correct pronunciation.

The online courses do have instructions covering all the rules of the English grammar, starting with the use of pronouns and the proper verb tenses. The audio component of the online course will enable learners to listen to native English speakers reading short dialogues, which they the learner could also read for himself, and then practice reading aloud. They can progress with the course by reading general articles, which would give them the possibility to practice their reading skills. They can listen to and then answer questions to test how well they understand the material.

The lessons progress from easy to advanced, while offering instructions and practice exercises on every topic. When students set their time for taking the course, they should always review the previously learned material as each lesson is built on the previous one. Even though they may notice that lessons on specific topics are not placed together, they shouldn't skip the ones among them.

Flexibility is a major benefit of e-learning. Education is available when and where it is needed. E-learning can be done at the office, at home, on the trip, 24 hours a day, and seven days a week.

Learners like e-learning because it accommodates different types of learning styles. They have the advantage of learning at their own place. Students can learn through a variety of activities that apply to many different learning styles also. Learners can incorporate e-learning into their busy schedule. If they hold a job, they can participate in e-learning right at their desk.

Personalized learning. E-learning encourages students to look into the information by using hyperlinks and sites on the worldwide

Web. Learners are able to find information relevant to their personal situations and interest. E-learning allows selection of learning materials that correspond to the personal level of knowledge, interest and what one needs to know in order to perform more effectively. E-learning is more focused on the learner and it is more interesting for the learner because it contains only the information that they want to learn.

Develops knowledge. E-learning helps in developing knowledge about the Internet. This knowledge will help learners throughout their careers. E-learning encourages students to take personal responsibility for their own learning. When learners succeed, it builds self-knowledge and self-confidence.

Some of the additional advantages of e-learning could be obtained by using the instrumental environment Hot Potatoes (6). Hot Potatoes is not part of MOODLE but BOC possesses the necessary instruments to allow for exercises created in Hot Potatoes to be imported and integrated in MOODLE.

Hot Potatoes for Windows is an instrumental work environment which includes six applied programs. There could be used in creating interactive exercises. They are especially suitable for foreign language learning (multiple-choice, short-answer, jumbled-sentence, crossword, matching/ordering and gap-fill exercises).

The exercises are created using six programs:

1. JQuiz- a quiz with a multiple choice of answers (4 types of exercises). There are some examples of this exercises: **Fig.1.** Using JQuiz for mastering grammar, **Fig. 2** Using JQuiz for reading comprehension; **Fig.3.** Using JQuiz – Filling in the right preposition; **Fig.4.** JQuiz Filling in a missing word in learning of modal verbs..

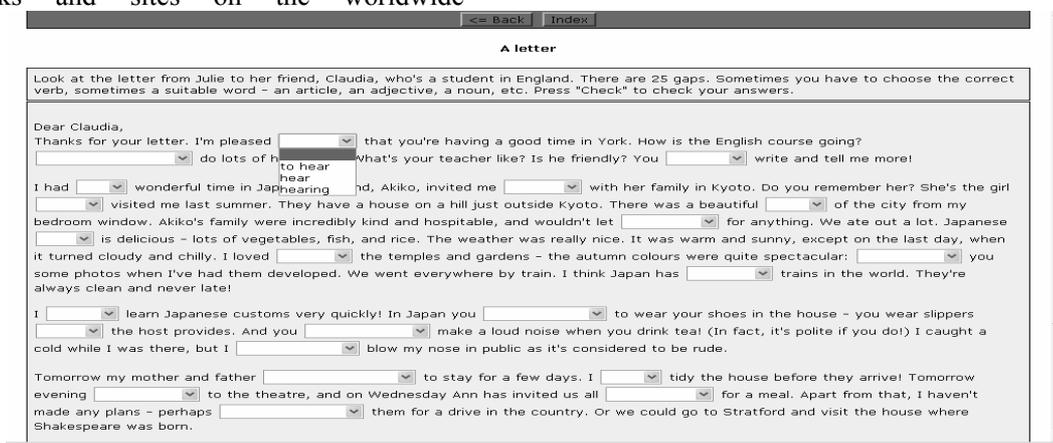


Fig. 1. Using JQuiz for mastering grammar

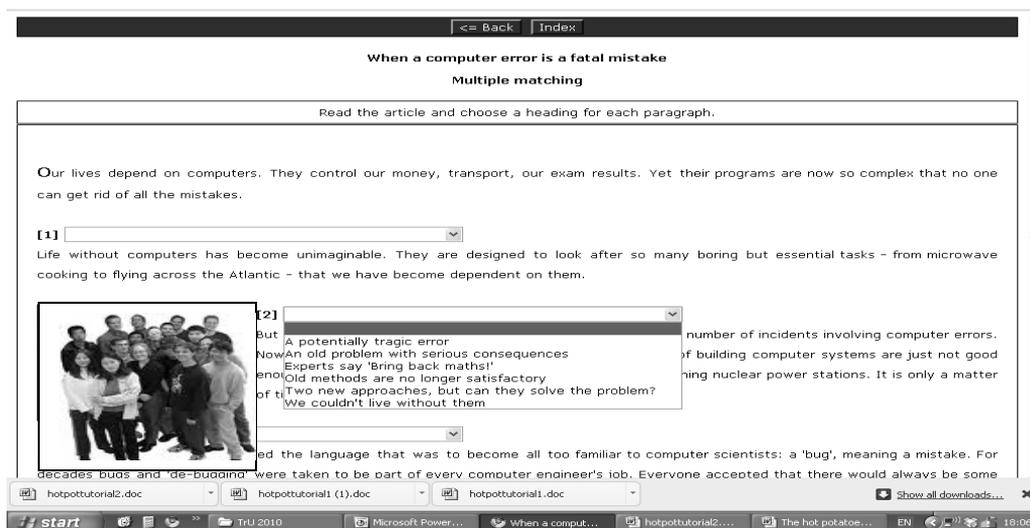


Fig. 2 Using JQuiz for reading comprehension

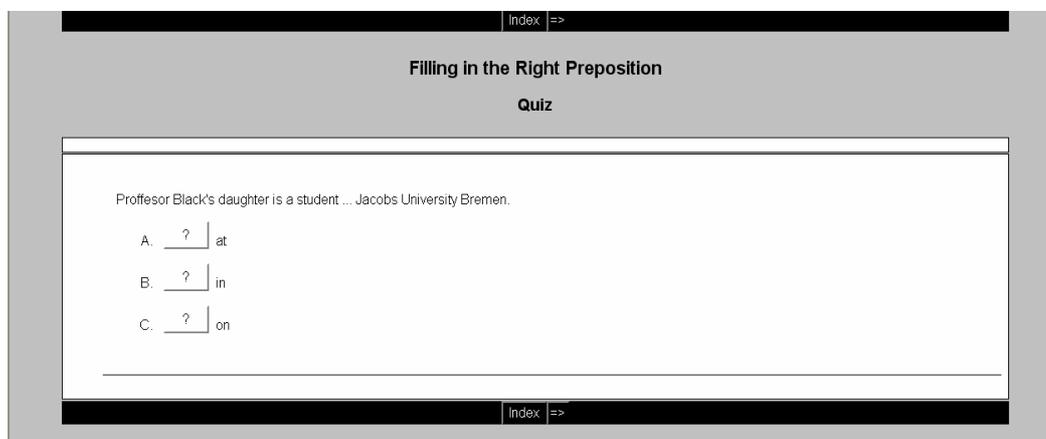


Fig.3. Using JQuiz – Filling in the right preposition.

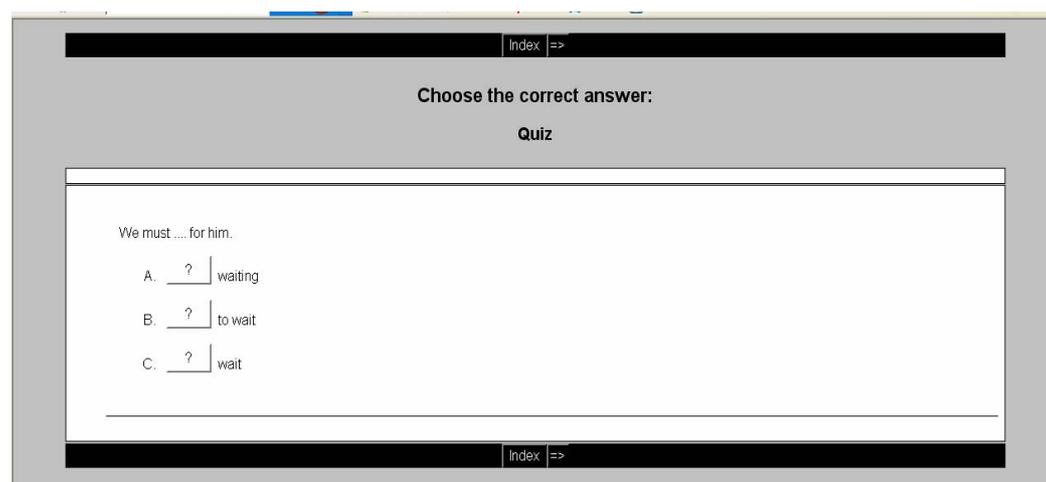


Fig.4. JQuiz Filling in a missing word in learning of modal verbs.

2. JCloze – filling in missing word/phrase.

There are some examples of this exercises: **Fig. 5.** JCloze – filling in a missing word or phrase; **Fig.6.** JCloze – Filling in a missing

word in Past Simple Tense; **Fig 7.** JCloze – filling in a missing word using the correct grammar form.

Traveller's guide

Fill in all the gaps, then press "Check" to check your answers. Use the "Hint" button to get a free letter if an answer is giving you trouble. You can also click on the "[?]" button to get a clue. Note that you will lose points if you ask for hints or clues!

accommodation	bank card	cash dispensers	charter	companies	exposed	facilities	fares	mandatory	operate
passengers	prepaid	provide	rail	restrictions	self-catering	signposted	surcharge	volume	wear

Tips for travellers to Northern Ireland
(excerpt)

Arriving: Major airlines [] services from the USA and Canada to Belfast International Airport via London. There are also direct [] flights to Belfast from New York and Toronto. A free bus from the airport drops [] off at the [] station and the International Youth Hostel. There are also regular overnight crossings and sailings, and car ferries from Wales.

Getting around: The [] of traffic is low. Roads are well-surfaced and []. Seat belts are [] for drivers and all passengers. Motorcyclist must [] crash helmets. Always lock your car and do not leave tempting articles [] to view. If you rent a car, check with the car rental [] the [] and mileage. Public transport services are reduced on public holidays and at weekends.

Money: You can get money from "hole in the wall" []. It is good to carry little cash for bus and other []. Cheques backed by a [] are widely accepted as well as major credit cards.

Fig. 5. JCloze – filling in a missing word or phrase.

Index =>

ON HOLIDAY
Gap-fill exercise

Fill in all the gaps, then press "Check" to check your answers. Use the "Hint" button to get a free letter if an answer is giving you trouble. You can also click on the "[?]" button to get a clue. Note that you will lose points if you ask for hints or clues!

Judy and her friend Glenda are sitting in a café in Liverpool

Glenda: So you [] a good time in Bulgaria?

Judy: Oh, yes. I'd like to go there again.

Glenda: [] you [] many people?

Judy: Yes, I did [] a lot of friends.

Glenda: [] you have any problems?

Judy: No, I didn't. I had no problems at all.

Fig.6. JClose – Filling in a missing word in Past Simple Tense.

< Back Index

Part 5: Word formation

Read the text below, and use the word given in CAPITALS at the end of each line to form a word that fits in the space in the same line. There is an example at the beginning (0). Press "Check" to check your answers.

HOW PLAY HAS CHANGED

The way children play has changed (0) considerably over the last fifty years.

In the past, parents did not have to fear the (1) [] of their children if they went out to play. Most (2) [] were communities in which everyone knew everyone and children could be left to play (3) [] by adults. In (4) [] there was hardly any traffic and a street could be (5) [] transformed into a football pitch or used for a game of tag. (6) [] things are very different today. Apart from the fact that our streets are much more (7) [] than they were in the past, the last fifty years have seen the (8) [] of more and more sophisticated games, (9) [] of course, the thousands of computer games on the market. Too much time spent alone with a computer may damage the child's (10) [] to form friendships with other children.

CONSIDER
SAFE
NEIGHBOUR
SUPERVISE
ADD
EASY
FORTUNATE
DANGER
CREATE
INCLUDE
ABLE

Fig 7. JCloze – filling in a missing word using the correct grammar form.

3. JMatch – Exercises involving pairing the correct object with the correct word/ phrase using drag and drop of items (3 types of

exercises). Example - **Fig. 8** JMatch with audio files – listen and identify the sounds.

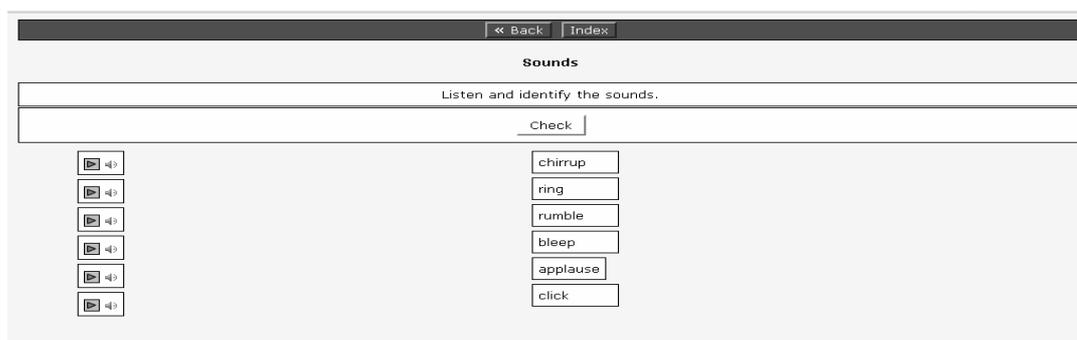


Fig. 8 JMatch with audio files – listen and identify the sounds.

4. JCross – Crossword puzzles.

5. **JMix** – Putting the words/phrases in the correct order. Example: **Fig. 9**. JMix – Putting

word or phrases in the correct order using audio or text files.

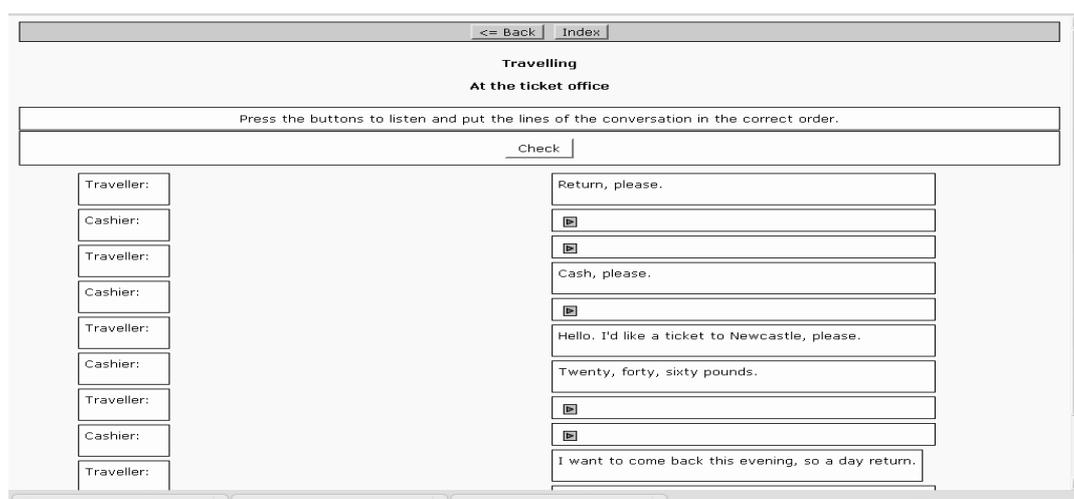


Fig. 9. JMix – Putting word or phrases in the correct order using audio or text files.

6. **JMasher** – program, allowing for combining different exercises and materials in thematic exercises and courses

The exercises created with Hot Potatoes can help in strengthening the grammar, vocabulary, reading comprehension and writing.

The HotPotatoes exercises could be:

- saved in a web format and used in a web browser;
- printed out;
- integrated and/or imported in the MOODLE using SCORM.

The HotPotatoes Set allows creating exercises, which contain:

- subtitles and instructions;
- prompts and feedback;
- buttons;
- different appearances of the exercise texts – multiple fonts, colors, highlights of text and etc.

- timer, to limit duration of the exercises.

To develop the listening with comprehension and communication the lecturer can use Audacity. It is a free, easy to use and multilingual audio editor and recorder for Windows, Mac OS X, GNU/Linux and other operating systems (7). Both the student and the teacher can use Audacity to:

- Record live audio under Windows, Mac OS X, GNU/Linux operating systems;
- Convert tapes and records into digital recordings or CDs.
- Edit Ogg Vorbis, MP3, WAV or AIFF sound files (Ogg Vorbis is a completely open, patent-free, professional audio encoding and streaming technology with all the benefits of Open Source.).
- Cut, copy, splice or mix sounds together.
- Change the speed or pitch of a recording.

To extend the possibilities of Audacity, both lecturers and students can use the set provided directly at <http://www.voxopop.com/> (8). The

students can create assignments and exercises in team groups for conversation, and also create dialogs and text for self-study without any additional software on their computers.

RESULTS

MOODLE VLE is currently in use in Technical College – Yambol (TCY). The lecturer's at TCY use these information, multimedia and communication technologies to achieve effective foreign languages learning. There is a specific MOODLE version for foreign language learning with improved features for audio and video integration and interactive forms of learning.

The development of the electronic content for the English language learning is done step by step and in accordance to the curriculum of TCY, and in the trial phase involves one or two groups of students. Following the trial phase an expert group analyzes both the electronic content and the results achieved and corrections are done if necessary. The students also take an active part during the development stage by using HotPotatoes, Audacity and www.voxopop.com. The main goals, which can be reached by the renewed electronic content, are:

- to acquire and strengthen vocabulary;
- to develop reading comprehension skills;
- to learn the grammar incorporated into the lessons.

Each course in MOODLE can incorporate different activities, such as lessons, quizzes, feedback, journal, glossary, database, wiki, forum, survey, chat, assignment. Using user registration the activities of each of the learners can be traced, among them results of quizzes, assignments, lessons taken, etc. MOODLE allow the use of different Windows formats such as Word, Excel, Powerpoint, PDF, Flash, audio and video.

The new and already learned English words could be connected to the course glossary by using a hyperlink. The course glossary allows for lecturers to define terms in any specific field that the course is designed for. On the other hand the student can look up words directly in the Glossary and can add new words in it.

To improve the effect of the lessons the lecturer can include audio files, thus enhancing the listening comprehension. After audio tasks the student would have to answer a few questions in order to check his comprehension skills.

The lecturer also has the possibility to check the students' knowledge of the already taken grammar material. MOODLE support a questions' database, containing multiple choice

questions, true-false questions, short answer questions, matching questions etc. The questions are stored in a specific database and can be used many times over during same course, or if possible in other courses as well.

The quizzes are checked automatically and can be re-checked in for some reason there are changes in the questions used.

The lecturer can provide the specific test begin and test end date, as well as test duration. He can also decide how many times a quiz taker can do the same test, and if the student himself will be able to see his result at the end of the quiz. When there are multiple quizzes over the semester to be taken, the lecturer can decide about the way the semester will be graded based on the quiz results (the best score available, cumulative, etc.)

The exercises created using the HotPotatoes could be integrated successfully using the HotPot Module

The duration of each lesson or quiz is not unlimited. It is defined by the lecturer based on the complexity and size of the material. The number of repetition of every activity can be limited.

After the completion of a specific lesson the lecturer analyzes the results using the tools directly integrated in the system – namely Item analyzes. It highlights the common mistakes done, the percentage of students, which have answered each question, etc.

The other possibility of the system is getting some additional information directly from the students about their satisfaction, problems, connected with the course, self-dependent tasks etc. The survey is done electronically and the answers are anonymous. The 'Survey' mode allows the possibility for asking questions which could be further used for the improvement of the course, of the types of quizzes, and generally to stimulate the e-learning. The students can participate in surveys concerning each and every different study topic.

The lecturer can give a self-study task using the 'Task' module. Typical self-study student tasks are essays, projects, papers etc.

By using the 'Seminar' module the participants can evaluate each other, their projects, tasks and knowledge.

The forum is the place for communication between the lecturer and the learners. After forum registration the participants gets copies of every new item directly in their e-mail.

The 'Chat' module offers the learners the possibility to interact in real time discussions.

CONCLUSION

The practice and research done, and the traditional administrative approaches can ensure no more than 5% of success, even by introducing quality management. 95% quality of education can be reached by using information technologies while at the same time research is being done and new content is being created, when there is access to all of the international educational resources in order to improve one's qualification and gather new knowledge. (9)

The application of contemporary digital technologies allows attaining the following results in the education process:

- Interactivity;
- Quality of education;
- Motivation;
- Possibility of self-dependent work;
- Improving of communicative competency;
- Self-evaluation of the achieved level.

It is a prerequisite for the exercises to correspond to fixed methodical rules:

- Well-grounded selection of language material.
- Continuity, succession and application of methodical system in the exercise application and increase in their difficulty level
- Interactivity and real-life situations being used for the development of the exercises
- Repetition of the acquired material.
- Intensification of the learning process with importance given on active and self-dependent learning.

In TCY we commenced the development of electronic content for English language education with the help of a team including philologist, methodologist, computer scientist and numerous students. Some parts of the tasks are given directly to the students to be fulfilled by them by using the BOC format. There is an existing grading system containing different criteria, which is in accordance to the requirements for education quality and the European language frame for level A1 – A2.

REFERENCES

1. <http://www.about-elearning.com/definition-of-e-learning.html>, 08.05.2010
2. <http://empowerlms.wordpress.com/2010/05/06/e-learning---enjoying-the-lms-advantage/>
3. <http://moodle.org/sites/>, 08.05.2010
4. Branzburg, J., (Aug 15, 2005), How To: Use the Moodle Course Management System,

NEDEVA V., et al.

- <http://www.techlearning.com/story/showArticle.jhtml?articleID=168600961>, 08.05.2010
5. http://www.newman.ac.uk/Students_Website/~m.m.friel/def.htm, 08.05.2010
6. <http://hotpot.uvic.ca/>, 08.05.2010
7. <http://audacity.sourceforge.net/about/>, 08.05.2010
8. <http://www.voxopop.com/>
9. Матвеева, И.В., Качество образования в информационном обществе, <http://cpk.mesi.ru/materials/articles/other09/>, 01.2006
10. Dineva S., V.Nedeva, Development interactive courses of education in Microbiology based on e-learning system applying in Technical College - Yambol, The 4th International Conference on Virtual Learning "Virtual Learning - Virtual reality, October 30-November 1 2009, Iassy, Romania, p.231-239, 2009
11. Nedeva, V. The possibilities of e-learning, based on MOODLE software platform, Trakia Journal of Sciences, Vol. 3, No.7, pp 12-19, 2005
12. Pehlivanova, M.,Zl. Ducheва, Quality of e-learning in Technical College – Yambol, FourthInternational Bulgarian-Greek Scientific Conference, "Computer science'2008, part III Kavala, Greece, 18-19 September 2008, pp. 902-907, 2008
13. Дучева Зл., М. Пехливанова, Някои педагогически критерии и показатели за оценяване качеството на електронното обучение, Известия на съюза на учените – Сливен, т. 11, кн. 3, 2006, Сливен, стр.20-26, 2006
14. Недева В., Сн.Динева и др. , Прилагане на виртуална обучаваща среда по дисциплините Екология, Микробиология, Обща и неорганична химия в специалност "Технология на храните", Иновационни техники и технологии, Благоевград 2008 - ISBN 978-954-680-570-6, стр.116-127, 2008
15. Недева,В., E-learning – условие за повишаване качеството на обучението, International Scientific Conference The Educational Policies of European Union, Yambol, 18.05.2006, стр.94-102, 2006
16. Пехливанова, Т.,В.Недева, Пр.Проданов, Increase of Education Quality in Subject Electrical Materials by Virtual Learning Environment, International Scientific Conference the Educational Policies of European Union, Yambol, 18.05.2006, стр.148-153, 2006