Abstract: The application of information and communication technology in the past two decades has greatly influenced the process of learning. E-learning because of its numerous advantages has become a very popular way of realizing a better and more efficient learning and teaching. Learners nowadays use the Internet and various computer software for edutainment. Although it has proven to be quite successful method of learning in many areas, the question is what is the usability and learnability of E-learning products in teaching foreign languages. There are many web pages, software programs used as additional source of learning that help students learn English as a foreign language. This paper presents some technical and methodological experience collected in the course of adapting existing teaching material for a complete online course for the second year full-time students of Information Technology at the Polytechnic of Rijeka, Croatia. Further on the results obtained from two groups (the one that learned with the teacher and the one that was involved in an online course) are analyzed and compared, as well as the teacher's and students' expectations and results achieved. The research has not been conducted as simulation but as current course and it can be therefore considered more relevant. The students have been divided into groups respecting their wishes.

Key-Words: - eLearning, ESP, Usability, Learnability, online course, ICT

1 Introduction
Teaching as a process can be studied from two aspects: the aspect of learning and the aspect of teaching. Thus, teaching is made up of teaching and learning as two supplementary processes. The basic elements which actively carry out the process of teaching are the student --the one being taught and the teacher - the one that teaches. They provide the basis of teaching as a system, but the content, goals and context of teaching are equally important elements [1]. The quality and the quantity of teaching determine interaction between the above mentioned elements. This process requires careful planning and implementation of appropriate methods and technologies which depend on the approach or application of specific models of learning and teaching. In traditional teaching technology has been mainly determined by teaching aids. These have been in their turn determined by specific quality of the content taught and the goals to be achieved. The purpose of teaching aids has always been to make teaching more effective and better. The application of IT has changed this relationship. The use of computers in teaching is no longer determined by the content in the way teaching aids have been. We can therefore take the computer as a teaching aid, but his role is such that we can also consider it as an active
participant in the process. The relationship between the computer and other elements of the teaching acquires a completely different quality. The possibilities of the Web and communication have given new forms to the basic teaching institution – class – redefining it at the same time. Although the above mentioned possibilities of access to the content and its selection are the same, the organization depends to a large extent on the specific course. To prepare and to carry out a course of mathematics, history or a foreign language in the context of eLearning presents different problems. This paper tries to establish in what way the application of IT influences the quality of learning and teaching a foreign language, in our case English for Special Purposes.

2 Problem Formulation

Learning a foreign language has a long time ago ceased to be the matter of merely blackboard and chalk thing and a teacher making his pupils learn grammar rules, inflexions, words out of the context. Audiovisual methods have been used in teaching for several decades now. First tape recorders, slide projectors, then CD players and television, and finally computers. Undoubtedly all these have improved foreign language teaching methods and enhanced learners' language skills. We are now living in digital age, meaning that computers have become an essential part of our lives, consequently of teaching/learning process as well. Even though the Internet, various computer software have been widely used by learners of all age levels for edutainment and in spite of growing popularity of online courses and E-learning in general, the findings of researches conducted on the effectiveness of such programmes seem to be ambiguous. When compared with traditional, online teaching has proved to be equally effective with certain subjects. In some other studies various parameters such as student perceptions regarding the effectiveness of the two teaching methods, exam results etc. have been taken into consideration producing different results giving advantage to either online or face-to-face learning [2].

In a foreign language class there is no ex cathedra teaching, the learner and the oral communication is in the centre of learning/teaching process. The application of ICT in FLT is mostly present today in form of various web sites students can visit in order to find some additional interactive activities and exercises to revise and consolidate what they have learned in the class. ESP with its specific content and learners' needs has also specific goals. The purpose of an English course at the technical college is to teach intermediate students the language and skills they need in order to understand and to work in a wide variety of technological fields and situations.

Some may argue that ESP students primarily need to acquire a foreign language passively i.e. that they should focus on developing reading skill on technical texts and on being able to recognize and understand vocabulary and grammar structures. On the other hand there is a growing awareness even among students of the importance of active use of specialist and general language in oral or written communication [3]. The classroom course taught to the first and second year full-time students of IT at the Polytechnic of Rijeka uses teaching material which aims at all-round skills development. The textbook used Oxford English for Information Technology [4] comprises authentic IT texts with a wide range of exercises and language work concentrating on those grammatical constructions which are typical of technical English. This introductory study therefore proposes, using the world known platform for online learning Moodle, to investigate the usability and learnability of a complete online course for the purpose of which the existing teaching material has been adapted.

When speaking about these two principles, usability can be defined as making web pages useful since a learning product needs to have an easy to use interface and it should serve its purpose [5]. Learnability in e-learning, as well as in general, means the ability of learners to effectively learn and retain skills and knowledge [6]. The paper presents technical and methodological experiences collected during a two month course and the results obtained.

2.1 Participants

For the purpose of this study 70 second year full-time students of IT have been divided into two groups. Their preference for either an online or offline group was respected, but also their mark in English at the end of the first year was taken into consideration when forming groups in order to have in both groups an equal number of students with different level of knowledge. Only a few students were put in the group that was not their first preference for either an online or offline group was respected, but also their mark in English at the end of the first year was taken into consideration when forming groups in order to have in both groups an equal number of students with different level of knowledge. Only a few students were put in the group that was not their first preference. (See Table 1)

All the students were computer literate and even though all of them used the computer for searching for information on the Web, online gaming, communication via e-mail, forum etc. only few of them had ever followed an online course (17,2%).

2.2 Creating e-learning materials

Instead of creating a completely new teaching material for this online course, we have tried to adapt the already existing one. We will present the difficulties encountered as well as some positive experience of both, the students and the teacher.

Creating e-learning material is a demanding project which consists of three basic steps: creation, development and implementation. A course development
A typical traditional class lesson consists of: 1) a starter-short warm-up tasks to get students thinking about the topic, to share their knowledge of language and the specialism and to start communicating among themselves; 2) reading (or listening) part - authentic shorter or longer texts intended to develop appropriate reading/listening skills introducing new content and vocabulary; 3) tasks and exercises providing speaking opportunities and communication for pairs and small group practice or writing exercises providing practice in writing instructions, descriptions and explanations.

Each lesson also comprises language work which explains key language items followed by two practice activities extending the student's understanding and use of structures and functions common to IT and computing. Even in this language part students are never given a lecture but are always encouraged to come to some conclusions and formulate grammar rules based on some examples.

How this look like does when transferred to the Web?
For starter students are given some questions introducing the topic of the unit. Possible answers are provided as a link immediately after the questions. It is up to a student to try and answer these questions first and then check, click on the link and read the answers right away or simply skip the whole activity all together. The main objective of this task – expressing and exchanging ideas, starting communication lacks here.

Reading task is most often done in class as silent reading so there is not much difference here. In the online course the words and phrases students should pay attention to are underlined in the text. Students are encouraged to make their own list of new words and look them up in an (online) dictionary. Since this task cannot be checked automatically students have to submit it to the teacher who then corrects it.

Comprehension check which follows can be done in two ways: either possible correct answers are given as a link and students can check answers immediately or again the teacher checks them individually. Reading on their own can be beneficial because they can concentrate better on the content, can take as much time as they need to go through the text and they learn how to use dictionaries properly.

In the class, vocabulary is discussed in the group as a postreading activity with students asking questions about parts of the text or words that they have not understood. The teacher encourages other students who may know the answer to share it with the group instead of giving the answer himself.

Since the teacher is a non-specialist in the field, students very often provide additional information and explanations on the topic. Every reading task is also followed by two more tasks: matching the terms with the statements and marking the statements as true or false. Both exercises can be easily adapted to the Web with students clicking the correct match, or true or false option. In the class the second task is also used as an opportunity for students to support their choice and correct false statements.

In certain units problem solving and speaking tasks where primary focus was on developing communication skills had to be either left out completely or turned into writing tasks. Considering various possible answers it was again impossible to correct them automatically. Some other types of exercises because of the limited possibilities of the program had to be given as multiple choice questions or matching tasks which again require less effort on the part of the student and do not develop active knowledge of English.

Some authors point out the following as characteristics of traditional learning:
- the teacher presents information, students listen
- the teacher is the primary source of information
- a student has learned the material if s/he can reproduce it successfully
- the performance of individual students is singled out and rewarded
- communication between students and teachers is periodical and therefore difficult
- there is no correlation between different courses
- it is static in all its elements

and the following as characteristics of eTeaching:
- eTeacher encourages, guides students who build their knowledge themselves
- different sources of information are used
- the importance of team/group work is stressed
- constructive method is applied which means that students are successful if they can use deductive reasoning, solve tasks, present their ideas and apply the knowledge they have acquired in a new situation.
- eContent uses all the advantages of audio and visual material
- there is correlation between different courses
- communication between the teacher and students is without time and place restrictions
If we consider a well structured and organized traditional class lesson of a foreign language we shall see that almost all the characteristics of eTeaching can be applied to it.
But is this equally true for an online foreign language course? Further on we will try to answer that question by presenting and analyzing the results of a test and a survey carried out among second year IT students at the Polytechnic of Rijeka, Croatia.

3 Methodology and results of study

Although initially 70 full-time students were supposed to participate in this two month project, eight students dropped out at different points for various reasons.
As we have pointed out earlier groups were mainly formed based on students' wishes. The results of the survey show that only 20,7 % of students who wanted to study online were put in the group which studied in traditional way and 34,5 % students in the group for online learning would have preferred traditional lessons.
Since the testing sample was made of IT students a higher percentage of students interested in eLearning would have been expected.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>QUESTION</th>
<th>GROUP (%)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Choice of study group on voluntary basis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Off line 79,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>20,7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Earlier experience with online learning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>17,2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>82,8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Satisfaction with the results achieved in previous online courses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfied</td>
<td>10,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not satisfied</td>
<td>6,9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>82,8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Possibility of substituting traditional with online learning (in general)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completely</td>
<td>6,9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partly – it should be combined with traditional learning</td>
<td>86,2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning should be only in traditional way</td>
<td>6,9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Possibility of substituting traditional with online learning (foreign languages)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completely</td>
<td>0,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partly – it should be combined with traditional learning</td>
<td>86,2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning should be only in traditional way</td>
<td>13,8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
could be combined with traditional one. In the online group nearly 14% believe that teaching should be carried out only in the traditional way, while only 6,9 % of the offline group shares the same opinion. When it comes to foreign language learning their attitude does not change considerably. Majority believe that traditional teaching could be combined with online teaching. It is interesting to note that in the online group 20,7 % believe FLT should be done exclusively in the face-to-face learning, while 13,8 % of offline students feel the same. It can be concluded that students in both groups are aware of the differences of particular subjects and the need to adapt teaching methods to a particular course.

Justifying their choice or preference for offline group, majority of students put in the first place the importance of direct communication with the teacher and as the second most important thing that it is more fun and easier to learn in a group.

On the other hand for the online group one of the main reasons why they chose this group was because of the possibility to choose when to learn. Only 34,5% of them thought that online learning was more interesting, and 10,3% believed they would learn more in that way than in the traditional lesson.

When self-evaluating the skills they improved through either of these two modes of learning, the offline group included all four skills, putting speaking at the top. The online group put writing at the top, then reading, leaving out speaking and listening all together.

Only 7% in the offline group found that the course did not help them develop any of these skills while slightly more than 27% felt the same about the online course. The online group had additional six questions. From the results obtained we can conclude the following: more than half students felt the lack of communication with the teacher (58,6%) and other students (55,2%). Although a small number of students had difficulty in adapting to the new way of learning (13,8%), even 86,2% had technical problems (the system crashed, the access denied etc.).

For 55,2% of students online learning fulfilled only partly their expectations, for 27,6% completely and for 17,2% it fell short of what they expected. This is also the part of the online group that would like to switch back to traditional learning.

Only 24,1% accepted to go on with online learning. Most of students expressed their wish for a combination of online with face-to face learning.

![Table 1: Results of a survey conducted among 2nd year IT students at the Polytechnic of Rijeka](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>QUESTION</th>
<th>GROUP (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>15. I wish to go on with online learning</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>58.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, but in combination with traditional learning</td>
<td>24.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>17.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: “-” denotes that the question did not refer to the particular group of participants Source: Authors
Together with the questionnaire students were given a test which was aimed at checking mostly passive language skills like reading comprehension, vocabulary and grammar. While the online group slightly outscored the offline group (48.27% online students passed the test compared to 45.16% of offline students), the average of points scored for the former was 30.3 and for the latter 31.6, meaning that offline group had better average point results by 4%.

This first testing did not include any active language skills, such as spoken interaction or writing, which will be included in the final testing at the end of the course. Relatively bad results obtained in both groups can be partly explained by the pressure students were exposed to at the time. That was the period when they had tests in many other courses, and partly by the fact that students are in the habit of learning seriously, in majority of cases, only for their final exams. The offline group which on average had slightly lower results was more numerous than the online group, and it comprised a few students who wanted to attend lectures even though they did take the exam in English language 1.

Because of the small number of participants in the research and a period of only two months, the results are not of high statistical significance. They will primarily help the teacher/the course author to develop the course further taking into consideration students’ suggestions, observations as well as their test results.

4 Conclusion and future work
The purpose of this introductory research was to examine the possibility of learning a foreign language through an online course, i.e. to investigate the learnability and usability of an ESP online course. Comparative research of traditional education and eLearning in most cases reveals that there is no significant difference between these two ways of learning.

Even though the test results presented in this paper support the common findings, further, more thorough testing over an extending period of time with a larger number of participants is needed in order to produce more relevant results concerning online learning and foreign language teaching.

The survey has shown that students in both groups consider verbal, direct communication as the most important element in foreign language teaching. Therefore it is hard to believe that online education could entirely replace traditional face-to-face learning when it comes to certain subjects, particularly foreign languages.

This does not mean that an online course could not be used in combination with traditional course, for example with part-time students who at the Polytechnic of Rijeka attend only 50% of the lectures.

. The findings of the survey conducted among online group students have made it possible to evaluate usability and learnability of some segments of such a course. First of all its usability increases with the level of student's knowledge so upper-intermediate and advanced students of English could use it quite successfully. It gives students more freedom because they can choose when and where to learn. It also teaches them to be more independent, and to rely on themselves for finding answers instead of waiting for someone else in the group to do that for them, the teacher has a better control of the tasks done by a student.

In future this project should include a larger number of students who would be tested over an extended period of time producing more relevant results.

The next step of this research would be to develop qualities this course undoubtedly has, introducing changes, improving it following students' and teacher's experience and suggestions and thus increasing its usability and learnability.

References: