Conference title

The Electronic Book - a Modern Instrument Used in Teachers’ Training Process

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Abstract

Since Internet became in the last years the biggest source of information, the book concept has been dramatically redefined, especially in terms of separating of its content and the related support. Practically, when using the electronic media, a book could take a different look - the electronic book (e-book). Due to their widely spread in the last period, the e-books are one of the most effective ways to support distance learning (e-learning), as they can be read by thousands of readers. Due to the fact that the teachers have limited time for participating to the face-to-face training programmes, the e-books became an important tool for promoting different training courses organized in the frame of various projects. It was also the case of the three years Socrates-Comenius 2.1 European project “FISTE - A Future Way for In-Service Teacher Training across Europe” - code 118766-CP-1-2004-1-RO-COMENIUS-C21, when the partnership organized the on-line courses entitled “Integrated ICT in Traditional Training” and “ECSUT: Educational Challenges & Solutions in Using ICT” [1]. The best practices and experiences of the teachers who achieved the on-line courses were collected and help the partnership to design a web-guideline entitled “Best Practices Guideline for Educational Use of ICT Tools” as a final output of the project. The content of the European course and the web-guideline have been produced as an e-book format by using Desktop Author software application. In this sense, the paper aims to present the most important features proposed by Desktop Author software during the design process of the mentioned e-books, together with the main facets presented by the related e-volumes.

Keywords: electronic book; e-publishing software; digital material; teacher training; best practice guidelines; Comenius 2.1. Project

1. Introduction

Even the new information and communication technologies have been developed on a great scale during the last decades, starting with the new century, the evolution of the electronic devices increased yearly with huge steps. Of course, our common work had also to be changed very fast in order to be kept up with the new electronic equipment revolution. If we are taking into consideration that all the things which surround us are computerized and a lot of things we are making are solved much easier with computers or other electronic devices, we can say that we are practically living in a deep digital era. Along with the fast evolution of the computer technology, various forms of
information distribution have been developed. Even the reading of a book is remaining like a pleasure for some people, most of the young learners prefer the electronic books instead of printed forms [2].

The e-books are more and more used due to the easier way of searching and reading of digital information, independent of the place where they are stored. They are fully interactive materials and can contain links, images, graphs, tables, videos, forms or Java scripts and can be protected by password and/or username. Most of the libraries initiated different projects for digitization of the traditional book content, in this way being offered a wide access to users from all over the world. This access is not limited by the opening program of the library and also by the number of the copies of a specific volume [3]. Other great advantages are the low costs for production and acquisition of e-books, the multiple scroll facilities and processing of information which attract more and more readers in the virtual space. For example, different printing houses are offering their books not only in a printed form, but also in an e-format for an easily modality to be read/listened in the park, in a gym hall or during the steering wheel process. In conclusion, due to their widely spread, e-books are one of the most effective ways to support on-line learning [4]. One of the biggest consequences related to e-books publication was the fast development of distance learning materials. The necessity for having digital materials for the e-learning market leads to the increasing of the facilities offered by different e-publishing software applications.

2. FISTE Comenius 2.1. project - aims, procedures and outputs

Due to the limited time that in-service teachers have for participating to different traditional training courses, the e-books became an important tool used to promote various training materials in the teachers training programmes. One of those programmes is represented by the Lifelong Learning Programme: education and training opportunities for all, launched in 2007 by the European Commission [5]. Former multilateral teachers training programmes have been funded by European Commission before 2007, like Socrates Comenius 2.1 Projects. As a relevant example of organizing on-line training courses, designing and using of different materials in a digital format (web guidelines, e-books) have been developed in the frame of three years Socrates-Comenius 2.1 European project “FISTE - A Future Way for In-Service Teacher Training across Europe” (http://fiste.ssa1.valahia.ro). Having as an overall aim to increase the quality of in-service teacher education, mainly through developing methods for integrating face-to-face and web-based learning as blended learning, and applying the designed methods for teaching in different IT based learning environments, the project partnership, formed by seven partners from five countries (coordinated by Valahia University Targoviste, Romania), tried to find new ways related to how the teachers can learn and upgrade their knowledge and teaching methods by using ICT, how to improve teacher education possibilities to use new types of technology for in-service teacher education and how to integrate and best combine face-to-face and web-based learning in European in-service teacher education [1]. During the project life, two of its main outputs were the on-line courses entitled “Integrated ICT in Traditional Training” and “ECSUT: Educational Challenges & Solutions in Using ICT” organized at European level. After the implementation of the new technologies in the classroom, the best practices and experiences of the teachers who achieved the on-line course were collected and the partnership designed a web-guideline - called “Best Practices Guideline for Educational Use of ICT Tools” - as another main project output. This collection included the best implementation experiences, teachers’ opinions and pupils’ feedback. Both European on-line course and web-guideline were designed as e-books by using Desktop Author e-publishing software (http://www.desktopauthor.com).

The volumes consist of two free executable files created by using html, wmf, avi, jpg and other file-types and they can be viewed at a whole, by compiling the whole amount of files using Desktop Author (fig. 1). In this way, even after the end of the project (in December 2007), every student / teacher / educator can benefit by the FISTE Project experience and read both e-books designed by the partnership, those being free accessible from the project webpage.

3. Desktop Author e-publishing software - methods and procedures

Desktop Author is revolutionist e-publishing software with a simple and intuitive interface which can be used by everybody to design 3D page turning digital web books. It is very good solution if the user is looking for creating and sharing e-books, e-brochures, e-catalogs, digital diaries, digital photo albums, e-cards, online resumes, quizzes, exams, tests, forms, surveys and so on and eliminate the postage costs, distribution or printing delays. The software presents a lot of facilities which recommend the product like one of the most complete applications dedicated to
design different e-publications [6]. It has to be underlined that Desktop Author offers to the user hundreds of templates for designing different documents in digital format. The application comes bundled with over 500 pre-designed page templates, buttons, a multi-select function, a fresh new interface and an amazing ability to produce digital books and pages of any shape. Although it is not the most intuitive program ever seen, it is fairly easy to use it. The application includes multi-page and multi-text flow, multi-media support - flash, intelligent search and authors index creator, e-book security, sticky notes with track changes, auto button function bar, auto page numbering and editable text or image fields. Some of the main facilities of this application will be presented in the following paragraphs.

The main interface has been designed for beginners, being very quickly and easily to use. Using familiar tools and respecting simple rules, even beginners can quickly create professional publications. It can be chosen a certain transition style between the pages for every e-book designed. The elements of the pages can be edited by using a WYSIWYG editor. The e-books can include links to different web-sites, e-mail addresses or even other files.

The e-books publishing process to different web-sites can be performed by using the included special instrument without any other programming knowledge. Uploading on a web-server of the e-book can be made by FTP. The content of the book can be secured and the e-book can be sold on the Internet by using the DRM (Digital Rights Management) facility.

The content of the book designed by Desktop Author can be protected by the password and the application offers the possibility to inactivate the printing or saving functions. The resulted e-book is similar with a classic one, but the costs and the time producing of e-books are much lower than in the case of the printed books. They are saved in a universal accepted format and can be consulted not only on-line but also on the not high performances computers which are not connected to Internet.

Figure 2 illustrates the main Desktop Author window (fig. 2a), as well as the specific window for the configuration options of the e-book properties (fig. 2b). The book properties mainly aims to the following aspects: establishing the e-book dimensions (Width and Height fields); introduction of a border and establishing of the color of this border; designing the background color of the pages; establishing the color of the transparent areas; selecting of a mask color; selecting the font; establishing the position and the implicit dimension of the text; selecting or not the automat page turn speed and the time for automat switching of a page to another; establishing the validity time of the book or of a certain part of the book; establishing the password for access to the content of the book; inactivating the options for printing and saving the book; inactivating the function of the sending through e-mail of the e-book; establishing the access rights; introduction of a multimedia block notification which will be displayed when the e-book will be open; establishing the buttons and their styles that will appear on the bottom of the book.
Fig. 2. Snapshots of the main window (a) and specific configuring options window (b) for the e-books designed with Desktop Author application

One of the important characteristics of the Desktop Author application is the designing of the popup images. A popup image can be attached to a certain page area, a text or an image which will appear when a click mouse will be performed on that area. When the e-book is finished, the final operation of packing the book into an exe, dnl or dnl with drm files has to be performed.

4. Results and Discussions

Organized in the beginning of the third year of the FISTE project, the European on-line course for European educators entitled “ECSUT: Educational Challenges & Solutions in Using ICT” was an improved edition of the first on-line course “Integrated ICT in Traditional Training” developed in the second year of the project. The nature of the training process required to adapt the training materials to a web format. Due to the big amount of information and examples presented during the on-line course, the partnership decided to use Desktop Author e-publishing software for designing the ECSUT course as a whole document which include text, images, tables, video and audio files. By using the web format of the course the participants could follow the information by switching the different files included in the e-book. The buttons from the bottom of the page allows the users to go through different pages of the book.

In addition, after the implementation process of the new technologies in the classroom, the project partnership designed the final output of the project - the “Best Practices Guideline for Educational Use of ICT Tools” - on the base of analysis of the data collected from the courses participants. The guideline is containing the lessons learned from the classroom implementation of the new technologies by the teachers who achieved the mentioned on-line courses. In this way, the guideline is emphasizing on the self-reflection of teachers about the added value provided by the ICT tools, implemented in various educational frames. The web format of the guideline assures the wide spreading of the information contained in this document which can be freely used by teachers and educators. Figure 3 illustrates snapshots from the content of the ECSUT Course (fig. 3a) and best practices guideline (fig. 3b).

5. Conclusions

The e-books proved to be in the last decades a feasible solution for distance learning supporting. During the digital era, the importance of e-learning process through e-books became important. In addition, the huge development of Internet and the lack of time for participating only to traditional training courses of all kind of learners explain the increasing of the number of various materials in digital format, from e-books to e-forms, tests, quizzes, e-brochures, e-catalogues or e-diaries and e-photo-albums and, not in the last, the increasing of the number of e-publishing software produced by specialists for designing such kind of web-documents.
Fig. 3. Snapshots of the e-books designed in the frame of the FISTE project: (a) “Chapter 4: Using Technology” - page captured from “ECSUT: Educational Challenges & Solutions in Using ICT”; (b) “iVisit. Videoconferencing in school settings” - page captured from the “Best Practices Guideline for Educational Use of ICT Tools”

Desktop Author is one of the e-publishing software used in the frame of FISTE project, due to its main facilities related to the easy and fast designing of DNL e-publications. Two of the outputs of the project have been designed in a web-format: the on-line course for European educators entitled “ECSUT: Educational Challenges & Solutions in Using ICT” organized at European level and the best practices web-guideline - called “Best Practices Guideline for Educational Use of ICT Tools”. Due to the properties established during the designing process of both materials, after the end of the project those ones can be used free of charge by every student, teacher or educator from all over the world. In this way, the project partnership had the opportunity to widely share to everybody the experience gained during the project life.

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References