Using apps in business English

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Many business English students own a smartphone; many use a tablet, such as an iPad onto which they can download and run apps. Some apps can benefit their language learning inside the classroom and enrich learning 'on the move'.

Apps

An app is a program which runs on a smartphone or a tablet pc. They are increasingly associated with 'mobile learning', learning on the move. A number of distinctions can be made when considering apps:

there are several different operating systems. The most common is Google's Android. Apple devices use IOS. The third most common is Microsoft's Windows Phone. Some apps are designed to work on more than one system

online app stores offer thousands of apps. Some are free; some cost a small amount of money. Smartphones generally have apps such as a calendar; a weather app; a stocks and share finder pre-installed

some apps can be described as 'authentic' in that they have been created for a real-world purpose, in contrast to apps produced by ELT publishers specifically for business English

'native' apps run entirely from your portable device; web based apps require an internet connection to access data.

Classifying apps

It is as difficult to classify apps as it is to classify websites. Categories overlap. Of particular interest to business English students are productivity tools, such as time-management systems. Social media sites such as Linked In and Twitter have app versions. The BBC and CNN are examples of media apps. The list of types of apps goes on - entertainment and games; educational apps; travel apps; communication tools such as Blackboard collaborate. Business English students may also be interested in apps created by publishers to help study for an exam such as IELTS; dictionary apps and an interactive version of the phonemic chart.

Practical teaching ideas for using apps

Grammar

Business English students can do extra, useful language practice on the move with an app such as Grammar and practice for business (Collins). This app contains many of the multiple-choice exercises associated with web-based materials, and is good for consolidating work covered in class.

Vocabulary

Teachers can use one of the many stock market checking apps to have students practise the language of trends. They can ask students specific questions, such as: "What's the FOOTSIE? (Dax,

Nasdaq etc)"; "Are Apple shares doing well?". Students can consult their mobile phones in-class to report on movements on the stock markets.

Speaking

Increasing numbers of business students are giving presentations with the on-line tool Prezi, which allows non-linear delivery. The 'Prezi viewer' app allows students to edit their Prezis off-line. They can also do a last-minute rehearsal of their presentation as they travel to the venue. Business English teachers can have small groups of students practising their presentations in class, using their mobile devices. The convergence of the Prezi format and the iPad has been described as a 'marriage made in heaven!'

Listening

Students using the excellent TED.com app can store their selection of the many presentations in order to listen to them later, off-line. The students can often access an interactive transcript, use 'pause' and replay parts of the presentations.

Reading

The Mind Tools™ app provides a collection of short, easy-to-read articles on many aspects of business, including decision-making, communication and stress management. Asking students to select an interesting article in order to summarise the content can encourage students to do more reading 'on the go', of business blogs or news articles for instance.

Writing

Students can take notes on their mobile devices, and then e-mail these notes to themselves. Later, they can cut-and-paste this text into a Word document. This can type of activity can develop students' note-taking skills at meetings.

Phonology

There are several apps which have an interactive version of the phonemic chart. These allow students to practise the phonemes most difficult for them, away from the classroom.

There can be little doubt that the area of apps is one of the most exciting in language teaching today. The e-book 'Apptivities for business English' (April 2013) includes ideas for using apps in-class, as part of a lesson, as well as ideas for students to use anywhere, anytime.

Reference

Hockly, N. (2011) 'Teaching the mobile generation' In Tania Pattison (Ed) IATEFL 2010 Harrogate Conference Selections IATEFL

Some of the ideas in this article are from the e-book 'Apptivities for Business English' (Pete Sharma and Barney Barrett) 2013 (The Round)

This is the draft of an article published in BISIG Conference Selections