

The future of English language training

At last month's conference for business English teachers in Poland, participants discussed the future of language teaching. There was very little agreement about how languages will be studied in companies in the future.

1 Match the terms on the left with their correct definitions on the right. What do you know about these expressions?

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| (a) f2f | (1) seminars delivered over the Internet |
| (b) M-learning | (2) a virtual world, built by its inhabitants |
| (c) Second Life | (3) mobile learning, using a smart phone or other mobile device |
| (d) webinars | (4) 'face to face', traditional teaching in a classroom |

2 Scan paragraphs three and four of the article. Replace the missing words (1–4) with the terms (a–d) in Exercise one.

Doing business in English enables companies to successfully compete in the global market-place. Therefore, many people believe that speaking English is an essential skill for employees. The latest report commissioned by the British Council, *English Next India*, claims that India will need many more English speakers to sustain its economic growth. It suggests that China, with an apparent 20 million new speakers of English each year, will have a competitive advantage in the future simply by having more speakers of English. If English is so vital to a company's success, why is that in a recession, a company's language training budget is the first to be cut?

Last month, in Poznan, Poland, business English training providers from around the world met for an annual conference, held, appropriately, at the University of Economics. UK business English providers reported a difficult year, with the volume of business falling. Not surprisingly then, participants exchanged views on the future of business English teaching: "how will teachers be teaching and how will learners be learning in the future?" Amongst the arguments, the only point of agreement was that the world of language teaching is changing dramatically.

Many people in the business English profession believe the [(1)] classroom will never disappear. On the other hand, there has been significant global rise in online teaching. A new term has arisen to describe busy business English students attending [(2)] or communicating through Skype: 'face-to-face online'. There has been a growth in [(3)], with great interest in delivering course materials to iPhones and other mobile devices. The small screen size presents some problems, but such devices now support video and users can do useful practice such as revising for a business English examination while sitting at airports.

There was interest in teaching in [(4)], where students can participate in meetings simulations and run PowerPoint presentations within the virtual world. Suddenly, the world of 'robot teachers' does not seem so far away. Elementary schools in Tokyo are currently experimenting with robots which were initially developed for cost-cutting reasons. If the downturn continues, and companies wish to explore cheaper options, how can they ensure the quality and effectiveness of their language teaching provision? Lessons in the future will involve a balance between the traditional and the virtual, but no-one is sure what the exact nature of this balance will be.

3 Read the whole article. Summarise current and future developments in business English teaching.

4 Decide which word does not form a strong word partnership with the word at the end of the line.

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| 4.1 | (a) online | (b) volume | (c) in-house | (d) face-to-face | (e) language | TRAINING |
| 4.2 | TRAINING | (a) material | (b) provider | (c) budget | (d) recession | (e) programme |
| 4.3 | (a) language | (b) qualified | (c) unqualified | (d) business skills | (e) council | TRAINER |

5 In small groups, discuss your language training budget for 2010. Will you continue language classes? If not, why not? If you do, choose one or two of the options below. Be ready to justify your decision to the class.

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| UK residential courses: multi-cultural groups | f2f: small-group study at a centre near you! | Learn online: web-based platform. Participants from around the world. | Second Life: join our virtual teacher in-world! | M-Learning: lessons on your phone. Teachers available 24/7 |
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