Apps to convert printed text to digital format – which one is best?

A question we often get asked at CALL is about converting paper or printed worksheets to digital or to a format that can be read aloud using text-to-speech by a device such as an iPad or Android.

This can be of particular help to learners who have literacy difficulties, who are print disabled due to sight loss or have difficulties holding books etc due to poor fine motor skills.

So is it possible to take a photo or scan a worksheet or printed materials and convert them into readable or accessible text? Well yes, it is and there are different options or apps including built-in tools to choose from.

I'll show 5 different ways or methods including;

- The free Seeing AI app designed for visually impaired users,
- Claro ScanPen for learners with reading, dyslexia type difficulties
- Microsoft Lens, again a good option for learners with reading difficulties
- The image scan feature in OneNote where you can convert a text image to editable or readable text.
- The Note's app which comes with the iPad.

Seeing AI
So to get started, with the Seeing AI app it is just a case of hovering the iPad or iPhone over the worksheet and it reads it aloud. A disadvantage of Seeing AI is the choice of voices, they are limited and lack a natural sound.

But Seeing AI has many benefits including recognising currency, objects and hand writing.

Claro ScanPen
The thing I like about Claro ScanPen is its simplicity, you take a photo of the printed text and it's just a case of touching or selecting the text you want read aloud.

Microsoft Lens
A free app which has some great features such as exporting the scanned image to Word via Office 365 so it become editable text or you can use the built-in Immersive Reader.

OneNote
Another free app, great for organising folders and files but OneNote also has an option to convert an image text into editable text. This time I'm using it OneNote on a Windows laptop.

Photos app
This only works on recent iPads and requires iOS 15 but it's quick and easy to use.