THE ÇA JOUE! PLATFORM: BUILDING AN AUTONOMOUS E-LEARNING TOOL TO HELP NON-FRENCH-SPEAKING STUDENTS AND COLLABORATORS BECOME ACCUSTOMED TO THEIR NEW LINGUISTIC AND SOCIO-CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract

The 15,000-strong population of EPFL is made up of students and collaborators of 120 nationalities. Because contact with the local language is constant - whether it be through work, study or everyday social situations - adapting to life in Lausanne is a considerable challenge for those who do not know a single word of French.

For many years, several types of modules based on different pedagogical resources were provided by the University of Lausanne Language Centre. However, as the number of beginners and their heterogeneity increased, a group of teachers decided to develop an e-learning platform. Called Ça joue!, it provides an online resource to prepare future students and collaborators - prior to arrival in Switzerland - for their stay in Lausanne. It covers both language structures (level A1 of the CEFR) and socio-cultural aspects.

10 needs were identified via a student survey and helped form the main outline of the platform's content. The main objective was to focus on a task-based approach, not only by including interactive automatically-corrected exercises, but by providing task-based activities too, thus giving learners access to authentic situations likely to be encountered in Lausanne.

Each unit was then created, including videos shot in the local environment and numerous resources and activities aimed at helping learners to get by in their everyday lives: looking for a flat, dealing with administrative procedures, communicating with teachers, etc. The learner-centered approach was followed throughout, and included systematic translation into English (as well as several sections in Spanish), and video explanations by six language teachers (English, Russian, Chinese, German, Spanish and Italian), all of whom recounted their personal experience of learning French. The plurilingual perspective, making links and comparisons between French and other languages, was one of the many objectives behind Ça joue! It was equally as important to encourage reflexion on language learning and intercultural communication as to suggest new language-learning strategies.

Even though Ça joue! was created to support students and collaborators prior to their arrival in Lausanne, it has also frequently been used as a complement to the different modules run by the Language Centre, offering all the advantages of a blended-learning online resource.

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