

# Leveraging Emerging Technologies in Online Language Learning for Newcomers

## An Overview of the OSLT/FLAP SDI Project Summary Report

### A. Context for this Overview

From 2018 to 2021, Colleges Ontario participated in a Service Delivery Improvement (SDI) project funded by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC). The goal was to examine how to leverage online learning and supports when helping newcomers to Ontario transition to employment or entrepreneurship through Occupation-specific Language Training (OSLT) and Formation linguistique axée sur les professions (FLAP).

OSLT/FLAP is workplace-based language and socio-cultural communication skills training for newcomers. Funded by IRCC since 2008, it covers 35 occupations in 5 industry sectors. Qualified language faculty at 12 Ontario colleges deliver outcomes-based courses in three delivery formats: classroom-based with web-enhanced elements, blended using a mix of classroom-based and online delivery, and exclusively online. The participating colleges include Algonquin, Boréal, Centennial, Conestoga, Fanshawe, George Brown, Georgian, Humber, La Cité, Mohawk, Niagara and Seneca.

Presented below is a high-level overview of OSLT/FLAP SDI online-learning activities and insights based on the final project summary report *What's Possible: Leveraging Emerging Technologies for Occupation-specific Language Training and Helping Clients Transition to Work* (Colleges Ontario, prepared for IRCC, October 2021).

### B. Project Activities

Colleges Ontario worked together with participating colleges to deepen an understanding of the effectiveness of online learning formats in meeting the occupation-specific language-learning and socio-cultural workplace communication needs of newcomers looking for work and those already employed. It also evaluated supports embedded in regular OSLT/FLAP courses and piloted new approaches to help newcomers transition to employment or entrepreneurship. Project activities included

- creating ten design principles to guide the development of online language curriculum as well as points to consider during implementation.
- piloting OSLT online modular courses for newcomers looking for work in their target occupations.
- developing and piloting OSLT online modular courses for newcomers already working in their target occupations.
- designing and piloting OSLT online, self-directed, language-learning activities in English and French.
- developing and piloting online training for OSLT faculty teaching online courses.
- piloting additional employment and entrepreneurship supports by integrating them into existing OSLT delivery formats.
- evaluating the effectiveness of project deliverables.

### C. Project Insights

Based on project evidence, feedback and observation, Colleges Ontario and participating colleges gained insight into 11 key issues relating to OSLT online curriculum and employment/entrepreneurial supports:

- Faculty-led, online delivery of occupation-specific language courses for newcomers works as well as classroom-based and blended delivery in helping learners meet performance-based outcomes.
- Formalizing guiding principles upfront focused the online curriculum development process and ensured a consistent, high-quality final product.
- Synchronous full-class sessions are fundamental to learner engagement and a successful online learning experience.
- A modular approach to online OSLT curriculum design is effective in targeting learning gaps, allowing learners to customize their language learning and increasing access to courses.
- Designing and delivering online courses for newcomers already working in their fields is complex and requires a different approach than for online courses for newcomers looking for work.
- Self-directed online learning activities and apps are effective practice tools for learners.
- Levels of language skill, digital competency and online learning readiness affect the ease with which learners can successfully complete online language courses.
- The role of faculty is as important in online delivery as it is in classroom-based or blended delivery, and faculty need to be supported and prepared for this role.
- Gaps for Francophone newcomers interested in FLAP courses include a lack of online workplace-focused language training curriculum in French and a lack of language training to prepare Francophone newcomers to work in a bilingual environment. There is a need to expand French-language digital tools for practising language and digital competency skills.
- Newcomers value online courses with integrated supports that help them make the transition to employment or entrepreneurship.
- Online delivery requires adapting how OSLT courses are marketed, recruited and administered.

### D. Moving Forward: Applying the Project Learning

IRCC funding allowed Colleges Ontario and participating colleges to explore, develop and test online modular occupation-specific language curriculum, self-directed activities and apps, and employment and entrepreneurial supports for newcomers. Evaluation of the OSLT/FLAP SDI initiatives confirmed that the courses, tools and supports developed and piloted met expected outcomes.

Moving forward, effective and accessible online occupation-specific language curriculum needs a strong design framework, a faculty-led, modular approach with the opportunity for peer-to-peer interaction and self-directed learning, awareness of client digital literacy, and integration of additional employment and entrepreneurial supports.

Colleges Ontario and participating colleges are ideally suited to increase effectiveness and expand access to high-quality online occupation-specific language learning due to their established capacity, infrastructure, consistency, coordination and experience with providing OSLT/FLAP and career-based training in general.

To request a copy of the full OSLT/FLAP SDI project summary report, please contact Sharon Low at [low@collegesontario.org](mailto:low@collegesontario.org).