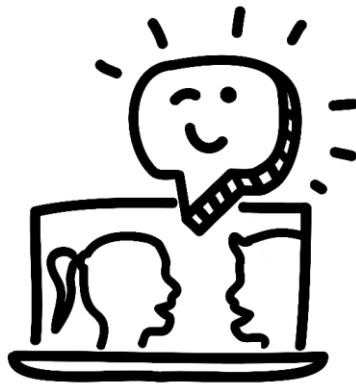


Fit 4 DigiLinE



INTERVIEW AND FOCUS GROUP GUIDE

Fit 4 Digital Linguistic Education

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1. FIT4DIGILINE PROJECT – OVERVIEW

The project "Fit 4 Digital Linguistic Education" aims at 1) **creating a European knowledge base of digital competence for language educators** and 2) providing the European adult educational landscape with a **newly developed online assessment tool**.

The partnership consisted of **six European organisations**: two adult education centres (**bit schulungscenter** from **Austria** and **Työväen Akatemia** from **Finland**), one language school (**Babel Idiomas** from **Spain**), one innovative educational technology & research company (**Innovation Frontiers** from **Greece**), one private training agency and consultancy body (**EGInA Srl** from **Italy**) and one state-approved assessment centre and developer of languages tests (**ÖSD** from **Austria**).

The main objectives are the following:

- Increasing competence in digital language education;
- Encouraging the use of digital learning and assessment tools by language teachers;
- Developing a European wide knowledge base of digital competence connected to personal and social competence;
- Ensuring the employability and further development of language educators in a digitalised world;
- Supporting the monitoring of competence for individuals as well as for education providers.

To do so, the partnership will cooperate to boost the teaching skills of the target groups with a focus on the **specific digital, social and personal competences** that language educators should be proficient in.

The **project results** to be achieved are as follows:

- IO1: a **cross-national report** about motivation and limitations for digital transfer of languages, used digital tools and good practices within language education. IO1 will be available as a PDF in English and all partner languages (GR, IT, DE, ES, FI)
- IO2: a new **e-learning course** with 8-10 training modules on personal, social and digital competences for teaching languages in a digital setting. Each module will also contain at least one video and one self-reflection assignment;
- IO3: an **online assessment tool** for language teachers to evaluate acquired knowledge and skills related to digital, personal and social competences. The link to the online evaluation tool will be made available on the project homepage as well as through all social media channels;
- IO4: a **Train-the-trainer-Guide** for the correct use of the assessment tool and the digital assessment of learners' learning progress. This will be freely available as a PDF file on the homepage, and the video tutorial will be made freely available on YouTube. The link to the video will also be available on the project homepage;

- IO5: a **MOOC Course**, containing six different course units related to digital, social and personal competence. It will be accessible for at least five years after the end of the project.

All the Intellectual Outputs will be uploaded on the [website](#), and it will be possible to download them for free. Videos produced will also be shared via the official YouTube accounts and [Facebook page](#).

Products and materials will be available both in partner languages and English, so to be easily accessible and further used and exploited in Europe and beyond.

2. INTRODUCTION

During the initial phase of the project, language teachers, trainers and managerial bodies of language schools will be directly involved in the **research activities** through structured **surveys**, **semi-structured interviews** and **focus groups** to create a **cross-national summary report**. The report will present the status quo of digital language teaching and the digital tools already in use, together with a collection of good practices in the partner countries.

The second step of the research to be conducted within this project consists in the **organisation** and **conduction of focus groups** to deeper analyse the findings obtained with the administration of an online survey to more than 250 interviewees from all around Europe. The aim of these first research activities is to investigate language educators and managers' opinions on their needs and demands, with a specific focus on Digital, Social and Personal competences educators believe is important to be competent in.

3. FOCUS GROUPS

3.1 The methodological approach

Focus group research is a **qualitative research method/data collection technique** that seeks to gather information that is beyond the scope of quantitative analysis. Our focus groups are structured to foster talk among the participants and interpret previous surveys results, deepening participants' opinions about the use of digital technologies to boost language teaching activities. Belatedly, the goal of our focus groups is to generate contextual and complementary data to be integrated with other datasets derived from surveys, individual interviews, and literature research. Finally, another goal of the focus groups is gathering and talking about good practices participants may be familiar with or have knowledge of.

Within the focus groups, the selected participants will be stimulated with open-ended questions in a discussion type atmosphere in order to generate comparative analysis of a given topic.

The Focus Groups should:

- Be based on a carefully planned discussion;
- Attempt to obtain perceptions of a defined interest area;
- Structured on open-ended questions' path, designed to gather ideas and opinions that are within but also outside the scope of prepared questions;
- Be carried out in a permissive, non-threatening environment.



The group needs to be large enough to generate rich discussion but not so large that some participants are left out.

Min. 5 - Max. 7
participants



Beyond that most groups are not productive and it becomes an imposition on participants' time availability.

Min. 45 – Max. 90
minutes



One trained facilitator and one trained observer should be always present. It is advisable to record focus groups with the consent of the participants.

It will be necessary to collect some background socio-demographic data on group members, and it may be desirable also to check for initial individual differences in viewpoint on the focus group topic. To ensure that focus groups are productive and do not become an imposition on participants' time availability, they should **last no longer than 90 minutes** and there should always be a conversational opportunity for group participants to express their options.

3.2 Focus group composition and selection of the sample

Since focus group results are not quantifiable, a rigid selection is not always needed. The best results are usually achieved when the participants are chosen according to both homogenous and heterogeneous criteria.

Participants should have something in common, but not everything, otherwise you will risk to have plain and not interesting discussion. They could come from different backgrounds and covering different job positions.

In line with the objectives specified in the project, the aim of the focus groups is identifying values, beliefs and skills about digital technologies in language teaching under the point of view of as many possible actors involved in the process (e.g. language teachers and trainers, staff in language schools, adult education providers with a focus on language education, researchers, general educational sectors, owner of language schools and managers). The focus groups should comprise **at least three participants**, but the ideal goal would be **from five to seven participants**. Each partner is supposed to carry out a minimum of one focus group by selecting participants with heterogeneous profiles. If possible, heterogeneity can be ensured by following these criteria:

- **Age:** participants represent different generations and include at least one digital native
- **Geographical spread:** respondents are from different areas of the country and work in various settings (e.g. urban, rural, etc.);
- **Gender:** participants are roughly equally split gender-wise;
- **Educational background:** participants have different levels of digital skills;

- **Role:** participants cover different positions within educational institutions (e.g. teachers, trainers, staff, researchers, owner of language schools and managers, etc.).



Organisation tip! Try to invite the maximum number of admitted participants (7) to be sure to meet the minimum requirements for the eligibility of each focus group!

Before starting the focus group, it is necessary to have prepared a **Consent form** (See **Annex A**) and a signature list to testify the participants' presence. If done online, it will be enough to ask participants to fill an Online registration form. It is good practice to administer an Evaluation form (See **Annex B**) to the participants at the end of the focus group's session to have direct feedback.

3.3 Suggested questions

Here below, you find a list of tips for organising and conducting focus groups. Feel free to adapt them based on your relationship with the participants, as well as the pathway and the accent into which the conversation turns.

After making sure that all the necessary documents (consent form, signature lists, etc.) have been signed by the participants, with the support of the observer, the facilitator invites all the participants to introduce themselves, including their professional or personal background related to the topic of interest.

There are three types of questions to be asked during the focus groups:

- **Engagement questions**

Introduce participants to and make them comfortable with the discussion topic

- **Exploration questions**

Focus and debate on the findings of online surveys and semi-structured interviews

- **Exit question**

Make sure that anything was missed in the discussion and that everyone had the change to contribute with their opinions

Focus groups have the same background and contents of the online survey. During the focus groups, the issues investigated with the questions in the survey should be used as prompts for the discussion. In particular, you should present and discuss results obtained with online surveys and semi-structured interviews.

Here we provide an example of a possible set of questions to be asked:

Engagement questions

- How do you find the role or the importance of digital technology in language teaching?

Exploration questions

- Have you ever used an online teaching environment?
 - If so, how was your experience?
 - If not, was there any reason that retained you by doing so?
- Which are the features that would make online tools more suitable to your needs and expectations?
- What specific competence should be developed in this area to maximise their impact and obtain better results?

Exit question

- Is there anything else you would like to say about the topic of this focus group or the Fit4DigiLinE project in general?

These are only suggestions and are inclusive but not exhaustive of the questions facilitators should ask. Other and more in-depth enquiries based on the discussion that takes place during the focus group are needed and encouraged.

The facilitator shall feel free to formulate the questions taking into account the **following areas of investigation**:

- The state of the art: the use of resources, digital tools and technologies for language teaching
- Strengths and weaknesses the educators have faced and are facing when using digital resources and tools for teaching purposes
- Resources and tools used
- Opportunities and obstacles
- Examples of good practices
- Need for training
- Online learning before and after COVID-19: how has it changed?
- Essential digital skills: let's imagine we have to structure an online course; which modules do the educators consider important and essential?

3.4 Facilitators and observers

The focus group is conducted by an *ideal* team consisting of **one facilitator** (whose presence is mandatory) and **one observer** (recommendable). The facilitator 'facilitates' the discussion; the observer takes notes and takes care of recording the session.

Facilitator's role

The ideal focus group's facilitator should fulfil the following criteria:

- Is familiar enough with the questions to be asked and the topic in general;
- Introduces and guides the discussion;

- Can listen actively with sensitivity and empathy;
- Believes that all group participants have something to offer regardless their education, experience, or background;
- Can keep their personal views and ideas out of the session;
- Can appropriately manage challenging group dynamics.

The facilitator should be able:

- To **adequately cover all prepared questions within the time allotted**
- to **get all participants to contribute to the discussion and fully explain their answers.**

Some helpful questions are: “Can you add something more on this topic?” / “Help me understand what you mean” / “Can you give an example?”

- to **remain neutral**, refraining from nodding/raising eyebrows, agreeing/disagreeing, or praising/denigrating any comment made.

Moreover, considering that some of the participants may be extremely expert on the discussed topic, it is also important that the facilitator maintain the full control of the session. For this reason, the facilitator should:

- Know exactly the purpose of the research and the expected results;
- Ask the right questions to get the information needed;
- Provide appropriate verbal and non-verbal feedbacks.

Observer's role

While conducting the focus group, it is advisable to have an observer in the team. In face-to-face session, the observer can sit outside the circle, they usually never talk during the session, intervening only in the welcome and conclusion phases and to remind the facilitator to cover all the investigation questions. If needed, they might also ask clarifying questions, acting as co-moderators.

The Observer must be able to:

- **Run 2 tape recorders during the session** (*as sometimes one does not work and it is terrible when at the end you find out the conversation was not recorded*).
- **Take notes** of the main topics discussed, in case the recorder fails or the tone of voice of some of the participants is not loud enough.
- Register any **interaction dynamic, non-verbal communication** or other **subtle but relevant clues**: they concentrate on the group dynamic, making sure every participant have had the chance to express their opinion, confronting with the others and the discussion focused on the topics given.

3.5 How to conduct a Focus Group in an online environment

Traditionally, focus groups are conducted in person using the face-to-face format. If this is the case and if you personally know the participants, assign the seats in advance. Remember that **a circle is an ideal seating format for encouraging discussion!** Both the Facilitator and the Observer are expected to welcome

participants, invite them to serve themselves with the welcome coffee, assigned their personal badges and ask them to complete the pre-group paperwork (signature list, consent form, etc).

Considering the current situation and the problems that may arise to carry out in-person focus groups due to the **COVID-19 crisis**, project partners involved in the field research for the collection of qualitative data identified **alternative ways** to replicate the above-mentioned methodology in an online environment. Among the different types available, the partnership decided to conduct **synchronous online focus groups** using online tools that will be agreed each time with all the participants.

Online focus groups are an extension of traditional focus groups, which have been utilized in qualitative research for decades and, for the most part, the principles are consistent with traditional focus groups¹.

According to a paper² published by the *Journal of Theoretical and Applied Electronic Commerce Research* (2012), the literature has identified some strengths of online focus groups that can be summarised as follows:

(1) they make it possible to involve geographically remote participants; (2) they are cheaper than traditional focus groups because they cut out some of the costs, such as hiring rooms, the moderator's travelling expenses, etc.; [...] (4) the participants make a greater number of comments, although these are shorter and simpler; (5) in the case of chat-type online focus groups, the transcriptions are available as soon as the session ends; (6) they have the potential to access participants who are difficult to recruit and (7) participation is convenient and easy. But there also some limitations to be taken into account, such as: (1) only Internet users can be recruited as focus group members; (2) the participants may experience technical difficulties in interacting, such as loss of connection; (3) the attendance or connection rate is low; (4) information from non-verbal signs, which contribute great richness to analysis of the discourse, cannot be used; (5) the role of the facilitator is much reduced as a result of the lack of visual contact with the participants; (6) the topics of discussion and the group dynamics are more limited; (7) the people involved cannot sit close to each other, so their only contact is viewing the participants' comments and attitude on the computer screen.

In order to facilitate the conduction of a focus group in an online environment, it is recommendable to put the participants at ease by using easy-to-use and accessible technology (such as Google Meet, Zoom, Skype, GoToMeeting). To be able to track participants' body language and expressions, it is important to ask people to keep their cameras open throughout the session. As with in-person groups, it is important to choose the right facilitators: they shall be able to engage participants in the conversation even though they are all joining the session from remote. The facilitator should also be confident using digital tools.

¹ Stancanelli, J. (2010). Conducting An Online Focus Group. *The Qualitative Report*, 15(3), 761-765. Retrieved from <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol15/iss3/20>

² <http://dx.doi.org/10.4067/S0718-18762012000200008>

When running the focus group online, it is better to **limit the number of participants to 4-5** to ensure they all have the chance to participate, be engaged and also to reduce strain on the moderator.

When beginning the focus group, the facilitator can use a prepared script to welcome participants, reminding the purpose of the discussion and setting the ground rules.

Focus group introduction

▷ **WELCOME**

Welcome and thanks for agreeing to be part of this focus group. We appreciate your willingness to participate.

▷ **INTRODUCTION**

My name is I am going to facilitate the group.

Let me introduce to you, who is going to keep notes.

My role today is to make sure that we have a productive discussion and to summarize the group's opinion and remarks on the selected topic. Me and my colleague will not refer to any participant by name in the report we will prepare.

The information will be kept confidential and used only by the research team of the Fit4DigiLine project. As all of you have completed all the forms [signature list, a few demographic questions (age, gender, occupation) and the consent form], we are ready to start.

▷ **PURPOSE OF THE FOCUS GROUP**

We are here to talk about the Fit4DigiLine project and how the (mention the relevant thematic area) represents an important issue for language educators and managers. For this reason, we have prepared open ended questions for you to answer freely and broadly in order to deepen the topic.

For the aim of the research, the Fit4DigiLine partners have already conducted online surveys and semi-structured interviews and are now going to further analysing the findings during this focus group.

We believe that in this way, we will be able to get more in-depth information on each of the thematic areas covered in the research and we will be able to create a more consolidated report about the motivation and limitations for digital transfer of languages, used digital tools and good practices within language education. This focus group will allow us to understand the context behind the answers given in the online survey and it will support us in exploring such topics in more detail.

Therefore, the aim of this focus group is to discuss about the specific topic mentioned before and to debate on the findings coming from preliminary research phases.

▷ **METHODOLOGY**

The discussion we are going to have is called "focus group". For those of you who have never participated in one of these sessions, I would like to explain a little about this type of research.

Focus groups are used to informally gather information from a small group of individuals who have a common interest in a particular subject - in this case Foreign Language Learning.

I will ask questions seeking information related to (mention the relevant thematic area) in your personal and professional life. There are no right or wrong answers and we definitely want to hear answers from everyone in the room.

I will be moderating the session and moving us along. If I think that we are spending too much time on one single subject, I will step into and keep the discussion moving. The discussion will be taped and the major findings will be summarised in a final report that will contribute to the elaboration of innovative eLearning contents and tools for language educators.

➤ GROUP INTRODUCTION

Let's start introducing ourselves. Please, remind to mention your name, your occupation and, if relevant, tell us something about your organisation.

➤ GROUND RULES [REMINDER]

Let me remind some ground rules for this session:

1. WE WANT YOU TO INTERACT

- a. *We would like everyone to participate in the discussion*
- b. *I may call on you if I haven't heard from you in a while.*
- c. *We learn from you (positive and negative).*

2. THERE ARE NO RIGHT OR WRONG ANSWERS

- a. *Every person's experiences and opinions are important.*
- b. *Speak up whether you agree or disagree.*
- c. *We want to hear a wide range of opinions. We are not trying to achieve consensus; we are gathering information.*

3. WHAT IS SAID IN THIS ROOM STAYS HERE

- a. *We want you to feel comfortable in sharing even sensitive issues.*

4. WE WILL RECORD THE GROUP DISCUSSION

- a. *We want to capture everything you have to say.*
- b. *In our final report, which will be made public, we won't identify anyone by name. You will remain anonymous.*

➤ LOGISTICS

This focus group will last about one and a half hours. If for some reason you need to leave, we can understand! Once we finish, if someone wants to stay and give more comments, we will be happy to listen.

While you are in the group, please, participate actively within the whole group and don't start side and/or bilateral conversations.

Turn off cell phones, if possible. Let's start! (The Observer turns on tape recorders. The Facilitator uses the Question list prepared before)

➤ CONCLUSIONS



We can now conclude our focus group. Thank you very much for coming and sharing your thoughts and opinions with us.

We will now provide you a short online evaluation form that we would like you to fill out if you have time. If you have additional information that you didn't manage to mention during the focus group, please feel free to write them on this evaluation form. (Immediately after all participants leave, the Facilitator and Observer debrief while the recorder is still running and label all tapes and notes with the date, time - if more than one group per day, and name of the group)

3.6 Reporting procedure

After conducting the focus groups, the moderator together with the observer will analyse the data and information collected, and will elaborate a personal interpretation of them.

It is very advisable to create a comprehensive report afterwards, based on the results obtained to better understand the context, the topics discussed and the participants' opinions and insights as they will be very needed for the sake of the research itself. **Such report will be used for internal use only.**

The reports can be done online or not, but to simplify the collection and comparison procedure, for the Fit4DigiLine project the partnership has agreed to create an online form that will be filled out by each organisation after the focus group.

In the [report](#) created, partners will be asked, **internally**, to indicate the date of implementation and focus group number, together with **participants information**. It is important to indicate at least the role of the participants, the years of experience and the organisations they work for to have a first general overview of the sample selected.

On the second page, there is a list of questions to be answered basing on the focus group results:



List of questions

What is the state of art in your country either at local and national level about digitalisation in language teaching?

(Please mention which resources, digital tools and technologies are in use to support and foster language teaching)

What are the main strengths—either from teachers' and students' perspective—highlighted by the participants?

(Include here any reference to good practices implemented by the participants, positive messages about digital tools and facts related to digital technologies in language teaching)

What are the main weaknesses—either from teachers' and students' perspective—highlighted by the participants?

(Include here any reference to difficulties and barriers encountered by the participants, including negative experiences and the lack of resources or knowledge)

Examples of good practices

(Describe briefly the examples, giving a short description and including links, if any)

Online teaching before and after COVID-19: how has it changed?

Training needs

(Please specify whether participants feel the need to join a training course to improve or enhance their digital skills)

Reference, bibliography, sitography or additional source used, if any

Attach files or additional material used, if any

The above-mentioned list of questions can be changed accordingly to the purpose of the research.

After the collection of partners' results, a consolidated and final report will be produced, highlighting the situation in each country, underlining the spotted peculiarities and differences.

ANNEXES

ANNEX A

Consent Form

It might be needed if partners will be able to do the interviews/Focus Groups face to face.

Name:

Surname:

Country:

You have been asked to participate in an interview/Focus Group by the Fit4DigiLinE project member (Organization, Country).

The purpose of the interview/Focus Group is to go deeper on the findings about the status quo of digital language teaching and the digital tools already in use obtained with the administration of an online survey to more than 250 language educators and teachers from all over Europe. Furthermore, the interview aims at collecting more insights on the abovementioned field, together with good practice examples in the partner countries.

The information learned during the interview will be used in the Fit4DigiLinE project according to its aims (research, training, dissemination, etc.).

You can choose whether to participate in the interview and stop at any time. Although the interview will be recorded, your responses will remain anonymous and no names will be mentioned in the report.

There are no right or wrong answers to the interview questions. We want to hear many different viewpoints and we would like to collect the opinion and ideas of different stakeholders from different EU countries.

- I understand this information and I fully agree to participate under the conditions stated above.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

ANNEX B

Evaluation form

Please, evaluate from 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (completely agree) the following statements	1	2	3	4	5
The focus group was better than I expected					
The topic discusses were interesting					
The questions were easy to understand					
I enjoyed discussing this topic with other experts of the field					
We were given enough time for discussion					
The facilitator encouraged participation					
I've got the chance to have my say					
I felt like I was listened to					
A focus group is a good way of exploring such topics					
I would like to participate in another focus group					

	Great	Good	Okay	Poor	Boring
Overall, the focus group was					
The facilitator was					
The observer was					

Was there something you think we should have discussed but we didn't?

Do you have any other comments and/or feedback? (eg. how could we improve the session?)