Digital Diversity:
Crafting Inclusive AI Narratives

Pr. Nr: 2025-1-DE02-KA210-VET-000354956

Methodology for Conducting Focus Group Interviews

Co-funded by
the European Union

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About the Project

Our Erasmus+ project Digital Diversity: Crafting Inclusive AI Narratives (Pr. No: 2025-1-DE02-KA210-VET-000354956) aims to transform vocational education and training (VET) through innovative, inclusive, and adaptive AI training. The core objective is to develop inclusive, accessible and ethical Conversational AI for education - such as AI avatars - that ensures unbiased representation, supports diverse learners, and enables adaptive content to create equitable learning experiences for all. This effort builds digital literacy, strengthens equitable learning environments, and supports educators and freelancers to integrate cutting-edge AI tools responsibly in VET contexts.

Project Pillars

Enhance AI-Driven Inclusive Education: Ethical guidelines and practices to mitigate bias and stereotyping; inclusive data management; ethical model development; inclusive UX and digital storytelling; adherence to accessibility standards.

Advance Digital AI Literacy and Readiness: Capacity-building for educators and freelancers in AI technologies, digital storytelling, user-centric design, bias reduction, and innovative pedagogy.

Innovate Adaptive AI-Based VET Training: An adaptive training model enabling VET educators to integrate AI techniques into curricula for personalized, dynamic learning.

Purpose of the Focus Group Interviews

The focus groups constitute Activity 1, A1.2 – Focus-Group Interviews and Analysis.

They will:

(1)Collect expert feedback to ensure our training content and AI avatars are inclusive, accessible, ethical, and unbiased.

(2)Identify best practices for speech evaluation, adaptive content, transparent AI interactions, and equitable user experiences.

(3)Translate expert insights into design and pedagogical requirements for the training toolkit and prototype AI avatars.

Focus groups are selected to surface rich, contextual knowledge that complements literature reviews and technical prototyping. They provide multi-stakeholder reflection on where bias can enter (data, models, interfaces, classroom practices) and how design choices either mitigate or magnify inequities. Insights will be translated into concrete requirements, acceptance criteria, and implementation constraints for the training toolkit

and AI avatar prototypes. The process is iterative: early findings inform low-fidelity mockups; subsequent rounds validate, refine, or challenge assumptions before development proceeds.

The focus groups also serve as an empowerment mechanism: experts and designers articulate needs, pain points, and success markers, shaping the agenda for pilots. By triangulating between the two groups (education experts in Germany and UX/accessibility designers in Bulgaria), we balance pedagogical priorities with usability and technical feasibility, ensuring recommendations are both educationally sound and productively actionable.

Scope

- Number & Composition: Two sessions, 14 external respondents in total.

o Focus Group 1 – Germany (7 participants): Inclusive Education Experts.

o Focus Group 2 – Bulgaria (7 participants): UX and Accessibility Designers.

- Format: In person or online (decided by host); both must be fully accessible (e.g., live captions, accessible materials, interpreters if needed).

- Languages: German/English for Germany; Bulgarian/English for Bulgaria; translation/interpretation provided where necessary.

- Duration per Session: ~90 minutes (±10), with optional 15 minutes buffer.

- Outputs: Transcripts/notes, coded insights, prioritized recommendations, and a consolidated A1.2 report feeding into design and training development.

- Ethics & GDPR: Informed consent, data minimization, pseudonymization, secure storage, and time-bound retention in line with EU GDPR and partner policies.

Recruitment will prioritize diversity in sector (public/private, urban/rural), years of experience, and domains while ensuring genuine expertise in inclusion and/or accessibility. Participants should have a minimum of three years of relevant practice. Recruitment draws on partner networks, professional associations, accessibility communities, and prior Erasmus+ collaboration lists. A transparent invitation outlining objectives, time commitment, data protection, and compensation (if provided) will be sent in accessible formats.

Scheduling & Format: Sessions run ~90 minutes with a 15-minute buffer. Hybrid delivery is supported through platforms offering live captions, screen reader compatibility, and dial-in audio. Pre-reads are limited to essentials to avoid cognitive overload.

Risks & Mitigations: Potential risks include limited availability of experts, technology barriers, or discomfort discussing bias. Mitigations include flexible scheduling, technical checks, and clear psychological safety practices (e.g., respectful dialogue norms, options to contribute via chat or anonymously).

Indicators (Monitoring & Evaluation)

Indicators span process (how the activity is conducted), outputs (what is produced), outcomes (what changes), and quality (how trustworthy and rigorous the evidence is). Data will be collected through attendance logs, accessibility checklists, consent records, moderator logs, post-session surveys, and a structured coding/analysis pipeline. Responsibilities are distributed as follows: the Moderator ensures fidelity to protocol; the Analyst curates evidence, computes metrics, and maintains the codebook. A light-touch dashboard will track progress against targets and flag corrective actions.

Process, output, outcome, and quality indicators will assure rigor and traceability.

#	Indicator	Type	Definition/Measurement	Target	Data Source
1	Recruitment success	Process	% invited who confirm participation	≥70%	Invitation log
2	Attendance	Process	Participants present / planned	**7/7** per group	Attendance sheet
3	Accessibility accommodations	Process	# of accommodations provided (captions, interpreters, accessible slides, etc.)	≥2 per session or as needed	Session checklist
4	Consent rate	Process	% of participants providing consent	100%	Signed e-consent
5	Time adherence	Process	Session conducted within planned duration	±10 minutes	Moderator log
6	Actionable recommendations	Output	Distinct, prioritized, actionable design/pedagogy recommendations	≥12 per session	Thematic analysis summary
7	Bias-mitigation insights	Output	Concrete practices to reduce bias in data/models/UX	≥8 total	Codebook aggregation

Focus Group Framework

The framework translates project values into practical routines before, during, and after each session. It emphasizes accessibility by design, ethical stewardship of data, and transparent translation of insights into product and training decisions. Each subsection outlines *why* the step matters and *how* to implement it consistently across countries while allowing local adaptation.

1) Roles & Responsibilities

Clear role separation avoids cognitive overload and ensures inclusion tasks are not sidelined. The Moderator maintains neutrality and psychological safety;

Moderator: Facilitates discussion, ensures inclusion, manages time.

Technical Host: Ensures accommodations, platform readiness, recordings, and live captions work; supports hybrid participation.

Note-taker/Analyst: Takes structured notes, marks probes, timestamps, and tags emergent codes.

Ethics & GDPR

Ethical practice is integral to trust and legal compliance. Consent must be informed, specific, and revocable; participants should understand what is collected, why, and for how long. Pseudonymization reduces risk, but does not eliminate it—hence access controls and retention limits are essential. Provide contact details for data queries or withdrawal and ensure partners have aligned data processing agreements. When using AI transcription, disclose the processor, storage location, and safeguards. - Collect informed consent (purpose, recording, anonymity, rights to withdraw, data use, retention period). - Use pseudonyms in all notes, transcripts, and reports. Store any key linking IDs separately. - Retain data only as long as necessary; default retention ≤ 24 months after project end unless legally required otherwise. - Provide a brief data protection notice and contact for queries/withdrawals.

Accessibility & Inclusion Standards

Accessibility is a precondition, not an add-on. Adhering to WCAG 2.2 AA improves clarity for everyone, not only persons with disabilities. Offer multiple modalities (text, audio, visuals) and pacing controls to respect cognitive diversity. Prioritize plain language and avoid jargon; where technical terms are necessary, provide brief definitions. Capture and honor individual accommodation requests confidentially, verifying they were effective post-session.

- Materials meet WCAG 2.2 AA where feasible (contrast, structure, alt text). Provide formats: PDF/HTML, large print. - Enable live captioning, transcripts, and interpreters (spoken/sign) as needed.

- Ensure device/network support for low-bandwidth participants (audio-first fallback, dial-in, downloadable materials).

- Allow breaks, provide a quiet space, and avoid cognitive overload (clear agenda, plain language, avoid jargon).

Logistics & Materials

Meticulous preparation reduces friction and frees cognitive bandwidth for substantive discussion. Calendar invites should be screen-reader friendly and include an accessibility contact. Slide decks must have proper heading structure, alt text, and sufficient contrast. Prototype artifacts should be lightweight and device-agnostic.

Standard Session Flow (90 minutes)

A predictable flow reduces anxiety and supports equitable participation. Warm-ups build rapport and reveal baseline assumptions; exploration surfaces systemic barriers; concept review grounds feedback in concrete artifacts; prioritization converts discussion into decisions; wrap-up ensures closure and captures final reflections. Timeboxing should remain humane—extend where accessibility requires and document any deviations in the moderator log. 1. Welcome & Consent (10’) – objectives, consent confirmation, privacy, recording notice. 2. Warm-up (10’) – quick introductions and first impressions of AI in VET. 3. Exploration (25’) – challenges, equity concerns, existing practices. 4. Concept/Feature Review (25’)– discuss AI avatar use cases: speech evaluation, adaptive content, feedback loops, explainability. 5. Prioritization (10’) – rank features/guidelines; capture rationales. 6. Wrap-up (10’) – reflections, missing topics, next steps, survey link.

Conducting Tips (During Session)

Inclusive facilitation requires intentional turn-taking and layered input channels (voice, chat, reactions, shared notes). Probing should clarify, not challenge lived experience. Summarizing and member-checking counter misinterpretation, especially when discussing sensitive topics like bias. Maintain neutrality; if the group drifts toward solutions prematurely, capture ideas but return to understanding needs and constraints first. - Use open questions and neutral probes; avoid leading language. - Rotate speaking turns; explicitly invite quieter voices; use chat for alternative input. - Summarize and member-check (“Did I capture that correctly?”). - Monitor bias traps (stereotypes, overgeneralization) and reframe. - Timebox respectfully; park off-topic items on a visible list.

Documentation & Data Management (Post-Session)

High-quality documentation accelerates analysis and reduces rework. Use consistent templates, timestamp key moments, and flag potential codes as you go. Immediately store files in the designated secure repository with versioned filenames. Remove any personal identifiers that are not essential to the analysis. Record any accessibility incidents and how they were resolved to inform continuous improvement. - Export captions/transcripts; clean and pseudonymize. - Consolidate notes with timestamps and initial codes. - Store data on secure, access-controlled drives.

Validation

Explanatory Note: Validation balances respect for participant time with the need for accuracy. A concise one-page member-check helps confirm interpretations without imposing on availability.

Cross-review between the Germany and Bulgaria teams highlights convergences and divergences, surfacing context-specific nuances. Where perspectives diverge, document rationale for chosen trade-offs and, where feasible, keep options configurable in the product. - Share a 1-page summary with participants for member checking. - Cross-review between the Germany and Bulgaria teams to compare themes.

Questions for the Moderated Session in Germany (Inclusive Education Experts)

Section Rationale: This guide prioritizes equity-critical pedagogy and real-world constraints in VET settings. Use neutral prompts and allow examples from diverse contexts. Encourage participants to differentiate between *ideal* and *feasible* practices; capture both to inform phased implementation.
Audience: Inclusive Education Experts (7)
Goal: Surface best practices for accessible, unbiased learning resources; validate features like speech evaluation and adaptive content for equitable outcomes.

Warm-up

Purpose: Surface prevalent design pitfalls and examples to establish a shared vocabulary for accessibility and inclusive UX within the project.

Purpose: Build rapport, surface contexts of practice, and reveal initial assumptions about AI in VET. Keep the tone conversational and non-evaluative. Encourage brief, concrete examples to set a grounded baseline for later discussion.

1. In your context, where do learners face the largest barriers to equal participation in VET? (Probe: language, cognition, mobility, socio-economic factors.)

2. What has worked well to reduce those barriers? (Probe: policies, teacher practices, technology aids.)

Unbiased Learning Resources & Pedagogy

Purpose: Explore how bias manifests in content, delivery, and assessment, and what safeguards educators deem essential. Aim to derive criteria that can be encoded into guidelines, data practices, and model behaviors.

3. When you hear “unbiased AI avatar,” what criteria must be met? (Probe: representation, tone, language neutrality.)

4. Which data biases most affect your learners, and how can we mitigate them? (Probe: sampling, labeling, context.)

5. What ethical safeguards are essential before deploying conversational AI in VET? (Probe: transparency, appeal processes.)

Speech Evaluation & Adaptive Content

Purpose: Probe risks and benefits of speech technologies and personalization for multilingual, neurodiverse, and otherwise diverse learners. Clarify boundaries where adaptation must remain transparent, optional, and reviewable by educators.

6. How should an AI speech evaluation feature support multilingual and neurodiverse learners without stigmatizing them? (Probe: formative vs. summative use.)

7. What indicators tell you that adaptive content is helping - not harming - equity? (Probe: personalization boundaries, teacher oversight.)

8. How should the system explain why it adapted content or feedback? (Probe: learner-friendly explanations.)

Safety, Trust, and Inclusion

Purpose: Identify signals that build trust (e.g., explainability, data minimization, human-in-the-loop) and practices that ensure respectful representation without tokenism. Capture needs for institutional policy and oversight.

9. What would make learners and educators trust an AI avatar? (Probe: data handling, local customization, human-in-the-loop.)

10. How can we ensure cultural, gender, and ethnic representation is respectful and accurate? (Probe: co-design with communities.)

Integration & Evaluation

Purpose: Translate principles into operational change. Elicit constraints (time, resources, accreditation) and co-define metrics that are practical to measure and meaningful for equity tracking over time.

11. What training or policy changes would you recommend for sustainable adoption? (Probe: teacher workload, accreditation.)

12. Which metrics (qualitative/quantitative) should we track to monitor equity over time?

Prioritization Exercise

Purpose: Produce a design-level roadmap by ranking components and policies for inclusion impact and feasibility. Capture rationales and dependencies.

Purpose: Elicit informed trade-offs and create a ranked shortlist that will drive the next design sprint. Capture rationales and any dependencies or risks that could impede high-priority items.

13. From a short list of candidate features and guidelines, rank your top five for impact on inclusion; explain why.

Additional Questions (Handbook & Personalized Feedback Navigator)

14. Which priority topics should be addressed in the Accessible AI for Education: A Comprehensive Guide to Inclusive Design and Training to ensure it is both practical and relevant for inclusive education practitioners?

15. Considering the Navigator's role in bias detection, accessibility integration, and adaptive content delivery, what main criteria would you recommend to ensure it provides valid, actionable, and equitable feedback for educators and learners?

16. What practical strategies or examples from your experience could inform the Personalized Feedback Navigator's guidance, ensuring educators can apply ethical AI practices in everyday VET contexts?

Closing

Purpose: Confirm constraints, identify de-risking actions, and agree on artifacts to share for the next iteration (wireframes, annotated flows, component specs).

Purpose: Provide space for final reflections, unaddressed risks, and meta-feedback on the session format and accessibility. Remind participants how their input will be used and how they can follow progress.

17. What risks should we monitor closely during pilots?

18. What did we not ask that we should have?

Questions for the Moderated Session in Bulgaria (UX & Accessibility Designers)

Section Rationale: This guide channels design expertise toward concrete, testable UI, content, and interaction patterns that embed inclusion from the outset. Encourage participants to annotate concepts with standards references and to consider low-bandwidth and multilingual contexts as default, not edge cases. Audience: UX & Accessibility Designers (7)
Goal: Elicit user-centric design principles and integration of innovative, accessible features into training materials and AI avatar interactions.

Warm-up

Purpose: Surface prevalent design pitfalls and exemplars to establish a shared vocabulary for accessibility and inclusive UX within the project.

1. What are the most common accessibility pitfalls you see in education tech? (Probe: navigation, contrast, motion, cognitive load.)

2. Share one example of excellent accessible UXand what made it effective.

Foundations & Standards

Purpose: Ensure alignment on how standards and heuristics translate into conversational flows, avatar embodiments, and content artifacts. Seek practical checklists and component-level acceptance criteria.

3. How should WCAG 2.2 AA and inclusive UX heuristics inform our conversation flows and avatar embodiments? (Probe: captions, transcripts, color/voice options.)

4. What multilingual and low-bandwidth design strategies should be baked in from day one?

Interaction Design for AI Avatars

Purpose: Define humane interaction patterns for voice/text capture, feedback, and control. Address privacy cues, error recovery, and pacing controls to reduce anxiety and stigma. 5. How to present explanations (why a suggestion/score was given) so they are clear and non-patronizing? 6. What controls should users have (e.g., speed, voice, persona neutrality, data sharing, reset/redo)? 7. Design patterns to support speech evaluation (microphone states, privacy cues, retry, gentle feedback)?

Adaptive Content & Personalization

Purpose: Clarify how adaptation is communicated, inspected, and overridden to respect user agency. Capture safeguards against over-personalization and dark patterns.

8. What UI signals show content adaptation occurred, and how can users inspect or override it?

9. How to avoid dark patterns while encouraging learners to engage with recommended content?

Equity, Bias & Representation

Purpose: Operationalize representation beyond aesthetics—cover voice, language, gestures, and narratives. Identify review processes (e.g., community panels) to prevent stereotyping.

10. What practices help avoid stereotypical avatars or tokenism? (Probe: configurable attributes, community review.)

11. What dataset transparency aids designers without overwhelming end users? (Probe: model cards, data sheets.)

Prototyping & Validation

Purpose: Align on rapid, low-cost techniques to reveal accessibility issues early and often. Define privacy-preserving analytics that demonstrate inclusivity and effectiveness without intrusive tracking.

12. Which rapid prototyping techniques best capture accessibility issues early (e.g., annotated wireframes, inclusive personas, assistive tech checks)?

13. What analytics (privacy-preserving) would you instrument to track inclusivity and effectiveness?

Prioritization Exercise

Purpose: Produce a design-level roadmap by ranking components and policies for inclusion impact and feasibility. Capture rationales and dependencies.

14. From a short list of components and policies, rank your top five design moves to maximize inclusion.

Additional Questions (Handbook & Navigator Focus)

15. What design and accessibility topics should be prioritized in the *Accessible AI for Education: A Comprehensive Guide to Inclusive Design and Training* to maximize its value for designers and educators creating AI-driven tools?

16. In your view, what are the most important usability and transparency criteria that the Navigator should adopt when assessing bias detection, accessibility integration, and adaptive content delivery?

17. Which concrete UX strategies, tool features, or interface elements would best ensure that the Navigator provides personalized, actionable feedback without overwhelming educators or learners?

Closing

Purpose: Confirm constraints, identify de-risking actions, and agree on artifacts to share for the next iteration (wireframes, annotated flows, component specs).

18. What technical or organizational constraints could hinder implementation, and how might we de-risk them?

Report Template

Explanatory Note: The template is designed for consistent, auditable reporting across countries. Keep prose concise, link to evidence, and use pseudonyms. Where ratings are collected (e.g., usefulness, accessibility satisfaction), retain raw distributions alongside averages.

Use this template to document each session and to produce the consolidated A1.2 report.

Cover

- Project: Inclusive, Accessible & Ethical Conversational AI for VET

- Work Package/Activity: A1.2 Focus-Group Interviews and Analysis

- Session: Germany – Inclusive Education Experts / Bulgaria – UX & Accessibility Designers
- Date & Time (local):
- Location/Platform:
- Moderator / Note-taker / Accessibility Lead:

Participant Overview

- Number present
- Profile summary: (roles, years of experience, sectors)
- Consent obtained from all participants (Yes/No)
- Recording method:
- Data storage location & retention:

Session Summary (≤150 words)

For each theme, include evidence, interpretation, and implications.

1. Bias Mitigation & Ethics

- Key insights:

- Illustrative quotes (pseudonyms + timestamps):

- Implications for design/training:

2. Inclusive Data Management

- Key insights:

- Quotes:

- Implications:

3. Inclusive UX & Digital Storytelling

- Key insights:

- Quotes:

- Implications:

4. Accessibility Standards (WCAG, assistive tech)

- Key insights:

- Quotes:

- Implications:

5. Speech Evaluation

- Key insights:

- Quotes:

- Implications:

6. Adaptive Content

- Key insights:

- Quotes:

- Implications:

7. Explainability & User Control

- Key insights:

- Quotes:

- Implications:

Navigator Criteria and Practical Strategies (200 words)

- Focuses on defining the core criteria for the **Personalized Feedback Navigator** (bias detection, accessibility integration, adaptive content delivery).
- Summarizes practical strategies, examples, and design heuristics offered by participants to ensure the Navigator delivers actionable, transparent, and educator-friendly feedback.

Handbook Development Priorities (200 words

- Captures expert recommendations on the most relevant and practical topics for inclusion in the Handbook *"Accessible AI for Education: A Comprehensive Guide to Inclusive Design and Training."*
- Provides structured insights on pedagogical, accessibility, and UX-oriented perspectives for shaping the handbook content.