

Focus-group interview and analysis



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UNITED - Inclusion and Diversity of Learners with Diverse Backgrounds (2022-2-DE02-KA210-VET-000092335).

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Authors: UNITED Consortium

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**This documents is part of Project Action 1:
Develop Diversity-Centered Learning Objectives**

Interviewer:

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The **main purpose** of the interviews will be to become aware of the following aspects:

- Draw an appropriate learning experience;
- Create the learning objectives and the topics
- Balance learning objectives with engaging ways to deliver this training;
- Specify how the learning objectives would be assessed.

The **target groups** for this activity are the following:

Focus group (Questionnaire):

1. Students at XU Exponential University of Applied Sciences

For the purpose of the focus group interview 18 participants were interviewed.

Focus Group Interviews Analysis

This document presents the focus group interview analysis. The focus group interview with students enrolled in various undergraduate programs at XU Exponential University of Applied Sciences, Germany. This session was organized as a structured discussion with a group of individuals who had been selected based on specific criteria related to our project: students who are willing to improve their inclusiveness of their classroom and campus.

However, 18 students joined the focus group interview which was hosted at the university campus. All respondents provided their consent for participating in this session as well as for being photographed. The participants were from different social and demographic backgrounds.

For example, 27% of them have a foreign nationality (EU), 2% have non-EU origin. Moreover, 78% of them are living in Berlin by sharing small flats. In addition, all of them obtain the so-called 'Abitur' (German term for the final examination that high school students take to earn their secondary school diploma).

5% of them graduated from private schools in Germany and their main purpose of their study is to master a career in digital marketing or establish their own digital business. 68% of the respondents have been working students, however, 51% of them are practicing their field of study as a working student.

Key Findings

1. Understanding of 'Inclusion & Diversity Inclusion'

Inclusion and diversity mean for the respondents that no-one is excluded in the learning as well as in the campus life.

The respondents expressed their willingness that the 'Inclusion and Equality Office' must schedule regular sessions devoted to inclusion and diversity which will be held once per semester. The session will be extremely helpful for the first-year students

who are switching from high school to university. The respondents expressed their understanding of what ‘inclusion and diversity’ and more specifically the ‘inclusion and diversity in the HEI’ means for them.

All of them agreed on the statement that an inclusive classroom is a learning environment where diversity and the cultural behaviors are well respected (bilaterally).

2. Avoid the exclusion among students by further improving the inclusiveness of the academic classroom.

- Each professor should be responsible for promoting inclusion and diversity by stating their principles into their very first session.
- XU Exponential University of Applied Science plays the role as a ‘bridge’ between progressive employers and academia. However, 23% of the students expressed their concern that employers are having some prejudice to them due to their limited experience and they have not felt equally positioned.
- Flexibility in terms of the attendance on campus: nearly 70% of the respondents expressed their willingness for having much more flexibility regarding the on-site attendance due to the fact that they work. They consider that equality could be achieved by taking into account their individual case and specifying an attendance quota based on their workload.
- According to the respondents, the exclusion should be prevented by speaking one language at the campus.
- Since all programs are taught in English, all professors should design their slides and training resources only in English language.
- Since XU Exponential University is an English-speaking academic institution, it was suggested that English should be spoken throughout the campus even outside the classroom to achieve a fully inclusive campus environment. When XU Exponential University of Applied Sciences is communicating with various stakeholders it would be advisable to ensure that those companies promote the so-called ‘Inclusive workplace culture’ - foster an inclusive workplace culture that values diversity and promotes respectful interactions to all. When

working on a real-world task, the organizations must encourage open communication, collaboration, and appreciation of different perspectives.

- The language used in the classroom should be inclusive. Inclusive language refers to the use of language that is sensitive and respectful to all individuals, regardless of their gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, or any other characteristic. It aims to promote equality, diversity, and inclusion by avoiding language that may exclude, marginalize, or offend certain groups of people. According to the interviewees, using inclusive language involves being mindful of the words and phrases that were chosen by faculties and administration staff, as well as the assumptions and stereotypes that can be embedded through the communication.

The usage of exclusive language at our university is rare and internationally used, however, the students explained the following examples with some concrete suggestions for reframing:

Exclusive: "The disabled student in our class needs extra help."

Inclusive: "The student with a disability in our class needs extra help."

Exclusive: "He or she must attend the seminar."

Inclusive: "They must attend the seminar."

Exclusive: "This research is groundbreaking for mankind."

Inclusive: "This research is groundbreaking for humanity."

The respondents suggested that the inclusive language should be focused on the following aspects:

- Avoiding stereotypes: Steering clear of language that reinforces stereotypes or perpetuates biases based on race, ethnicity, religion, or other characteristics.

- Person-first language: Putting the person before their condition or disability, emphasizing their humanity rather than defining them solely by their condition. For example, saying "a person with a disability" instead of "a disabled person."
- Culturally sensitive language: Being aware of and respecting cultural differences, using appropriate terminology, and avoiding cultural appropriation or stereotypes.
- Accessibility considerations: Ensuring that language and communication are accessible to individuals with disabilities, such as providing alternative formats or using plain language.

By further emphasizing and using an inclusive language, XU Exponential University of Applied Sciences can create a more inclusive and respectful academic society where everyone feels valued and included.

3. Exams

A special attention should be given to students who suffer with various diseases, such as dyslexia, and etc. Their health condition and abilities should be re-considered by the lecturers in order to enable them to obtain the best possible learning experience. In addition, students who have a proven status of health problems or / and disabilities must be provided with an exam format which matches with their physical and mental abilities and won't place them in an unequal position.

However, the first-year students should be introduced with the various exam forms into the very beginning of their enrollment. Some students struggled to understand the matter and the requirements of some exam formats, such as: term paper, case study, and etc.

However, the respondents suggested the following key improvements:

- Consider cultural and linguistic diversity: faculties should be mindful of the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of their students. They must avoid assuming specific cultural knowledge or relying heavily on language proficiency in questions. When using culturally specific examples, explanations or context should be provided.

- Avoid unnecessary complexity: whenever there is a written exam, the exam questions should be focused on assessing the required knowledge or skills. Unnecessarily complex language, convoluted sentence structures, or excessive use of jargon must be avoided. Since English is a second language for almost all students, the used language must be clear and concise.

4. Campus Life

In order to improve the inclusiveness of the campus, the following suggestions were provided by the respondents:

- XU Exponential University must regularly organize sport events where inclusiveness and the equality will be promoted. During the sport event, the formation of mixed-gender or diverse teams should be encouraged. By intentionally mixing students from different backgrounds and abilities, XU Exponential University of Applied Sciences could promote collaboration, teamwork, and respect for diversity.
- Organize events that celebrate cultural diversity and provide opportunities for students to learn about different traditions, customs, and sports from various cultures. Encourage teams and participants to showcase their cultural identities and foster mutual respect and understanding.
- Organizing meditation sessions for students which promote accessible and adaptable practices. Meditation sessions on campus can be designed to accommodate various physical abilities, learning styles, and cultural preferences. Providing options for seated or lying-down positions, incorporating different meditation techniques, and acknowledging cultural preferences can ensure that the practice is accessible and welcoming to a diverse range of individuals.

These sessions can be highly beneficial in reducing anxiety among students before exams.

Finally, the students recommended further improving our campus setting as a barrier-free to everyone. Creating a barrier-free student campus involves making the physical environment, infrastructure, and services accessible to all individuals, including those with disabilities. Most of the interviewed expressed the following suggestions and steps to promote a barrier-free campus:

- Conduct an accessibility audit: a comprehensive accessibility audit of the campus should be conducted. This involves assessing the two floors, pathways, classrooms, restrooms, recreational areas, parking lots, and other facilities to identify barriers and areas that need improvement.
- XU Exponential University should ensure even more accessible infrastructure: some necessary modifications should be made to ensure that all rooms and facilities comply with accessibility standards. This may include installing ramps, handrails, accessible entrances, automatic doors, and accessible restrooms. Ensure that the infrastructure allows for easy maneuverability and accommodates individuals with mobility aids.

Questionnaire

Demographics / education

1. Age
2. Formal education
3. Non-formal education

Study / Work

4. What is your current occupation?
5. Are you currently collaborating with people with diverse backgrounds (age, gender, sexual orientation, race, religion, maternity, etc)?
 - *What motivated you to become part of it?*
 - *What do you like about it?*
 - *What challenges do you face on a daily basis?*
 - Have you ever experienced/ witnessed discrimination or bias based on any of the above characteristics?

Needs

6. What does the term "inclusion and diversity" mean to you?
7. Have you experienced any situations where you felt excluded or discriminated against because of your race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, or any other aspect of your identity?
8. Have you ever witnessed discrimination or exclusion towards some of your peers? If so, how did you respond?

9. In your opinion, what can be done to make students feel more comfortable speaking up about issues related to inclusion and diversity?

10. Do you think the training resources include equal examples of projects produced by men and women?

11. What were some of the biggest challenges you faced during your transition to university life?

12. What suggestions do you have for your university to create a more inclusive and diverse campus culture?

13. What resources or support systems did you find helpful in navigating the transition to university from High School?

14. How did you adjust to the academic workload and expectations of university compared to high school?

15. Did you find the social environment at university different from your previous experiences in school? If so, how did you navigate this?

16. What steps do you think our university can take to promote diversity and inclusion?

17. How can faculties and administration support and advocate for inclusion and diversity in our university?

18. Do you feel that your study performance / work is equally appreciated as that of men/women?

19. Is there anything else you would like to share with us?

Photos taken during the interviews
Credit: XU Exponential University of Applied Sciences



Participation List

N	Name / Surname	I give permission to take photographs and / or video of me (tick)
1	Noah Krstanovic	Yes
2	Paul Tzanavaros	Yes
3	Chelsea Priscilla Cretu	Yes
4	Maria-Magdalena Humeniuc	Yes
5	Marie Gruening	Yes
6	Luca Ueding	Yes
7	Andy Tran	Yes
8	Sophia Chojnicki	Yes
9	Jennifer Roth	Yes
10	Anna Maria Wantoch-Rekowski	Yes
11	Marissa Woeber	Yes
12	Alicja Kofler	Yes
13	Kiara van der Merwe	Yes
14	Saba Mayer	Yes
15	Phi Hung Nguyen	Yes
16	Koray Ece	Yes
17	Vincent Otto	Yes
18	Jass Maria Di Dominico	Yes