

# O1 – European Comparative Report

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## Introduction

This document gathers the main conclusions of the work carried out in the framework of the IO1 “Framework & Research” of the MEANING project.

## Presentation of the project

The MEANING project aims at developing guidelines for English language teachers in order to respond better to the learning needs of senior students, to motivate and activate seniors’ learners to learn and participate in lifelong learning. The project also aims to find a way to help senior learners with learning processes to improve their language skills and to reach better results in English language learning.

In order to reach its objectives, the project’s implementation will take place in several stages:

- Framework and Research (IO1): This task aims at defining and understanding language teachers and senior learners’ needs in the language learning processes. It is a users’ requirements phase which results are presented in the current report.
- Guidelines for teaching adults – methodology, learning strategies and techniques, ideas (IO2): After analysing the users’ needs, the partnership will develop a guideline explaining the methodology to be adopted when teaching senior students, taking the specificities of the audience into account.
- Ready to use cards (IO3): A minimum of 60 cards will be developed by the partnership in order to support the language teacher in his/her classes. These cards will display some easy activities to put in practice with a group of adult learners.
- E-Learning platform (IO4): Finally, all the material gathered during the project will be made available for a community of teachers and adult learners across Europe on an e-learning platform.

## Methodology

The development of this intellectual output started with desk research that was implemented in every country of the partnership: Poland, France, United Kingdom, Lithuania and Germany.

Then, focus groups were organised in each country and in-depth interviews with language teachers were conducted. This interaction with the target population of the project from its early stages of

development will allow the consortium to implement design-thinking methodology: knowing your target population and its needs and expectations will support the creation of a fine-tuned methodology.

## Desk research

European societies are ageing. According to Eurostat, in 2019, more than one fifth (20.3 %) of the EU-27 population was aged 65 and over. The share of people aged 80 years or above in the EU-27's population is projected to have a two and a half fold increase between 2019 and 2100, from 5.8 % to 14.6 %. This phenomenon can be explained by low birth rates, higher life expectancy and no country involved in the partnership is exempt from this observation.

Both in France and Lithuania, employment of older people is increasing. The interest of seniors in an active lifestyle is an inherent element of social changes in Europe. Older people experience better and better health, they are more and more agile, and they want to spend time after their professional activity, in harmony with their own body and making their dreams come true. Therefore, a very important task for trainers and educators is undoubtedly to develop methods of working with people of senior age, who constitute a new group on the market of educational services, often raising many concerns among teachers. Seniors are a very heterogeneous group - this is due not only to age differences (55/60-90), professional differentiation and, most importantly, differentiation in the context of foreign language skills.

### **Who are the seniors learning new languages ?**

A survey was conducted in Poland in 2011 in 43 Universities of the Third Age and 9 other centres offering language courses for seniors and also via the Internet. 2,145 respondents who participated were aged 48 to 94 years. 86% among the seniors participating in the study were women, therefore the share of men in this group is less than 14%, which is the main characteristics of this group of learners. This characteristic is also underlined in Germany where **women** are keener to learn new languages. In Poland, more than 70% of all respondents **live in large cities**, 25% in small towns, and less than 4.5 percent come from rural areas. **Higher education** has over 63%, and secondary education - almost 36%. Only 15 people from the entire group have primary education, which is 0.7%. (Jaroszewska 2013).

Some language courses specifically targeted to seniors already exist in Germany and in the partnership other countries, most language courses for seniors are offered by the Third Age Universities. A public education institution called “*Volkshochschule*” offers mostly English courses for senior learners (54 years old and plus). In the UK, in a large-scale 2017 survey, it was found that 29% of adults aged 55-64 participate in some form of learning, while only 18% of adults aged 65-74 do and 10% of 75+. In France, in 2018, nearly 15% of students enrolled in lifelong education at university are retired. Retirees and early retirees over 60 years old represent 15% to 20% of those registered with the *Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers*’ various MOOCs. According to an Ifop study for Babbel, the online learning platform, 85% of senior citizens in France say they are capable of learning a foreign language. However, this trend is not observed in all the member-states; for instance, according to EPALE, in Lithuania, there are only 0.93% of 65+ years persons who are involved in learning activities (the European average being 10.9%). According to the same study, the main barrier preventing Lithuanian seniors to be involved in long-life learning activities is due to economics.

### What are their motivations?

In France, according to the Ifop study for Babbel, 91% of those surveyed believe that learning a foreign language after the age of 60 is one of the best ways to **stay mentally alert**. The cognitive stimulation is also an announced motivation for new skills acquisition in Germany. In the UK, the 2017 survey previously quoted found that these groups with the least participation (older adults) in learning also had the highest amount of motivation; 94% of active learners aged 75+ cited **leisure** or **personal interest** as their motivation, while only 12% of people aged 17-24 did.

### Focus Groups

Seven focus groups (FG) were implemented in the framework of the project at the following dates:

- 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> of February 2021 in Poland
- 12<sup>th</sup> of February 2021 in the UK
- 12<sup>th</sup> of February 2021 in France
- 15<sup>th</sup> of February 2021 in Lithuania
- 18<sup>th</sup> of February 2021 in Germany

A total of 39 stakeholders were involved: 38% were seniors learners while 62% of the participants represented the teaching field.

Country	Type of FG	Participants
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UK	Online	3 seniors learners 3 language teachers
LT	Online	3 seniors learners 1 English teacher 2 adult educators
PL	Online	3 English teachers 1 German teacher 1 adult educator 2 facilitators
PL	Online	3 senior learners 2 adult educators 2 facilitators
FR	Online	3 language teachers 2 adult educators 2 seniors learners
GE		2 adult educators 4 seniors learners

A harmonized procedure was created by the partnership in order to collect comparable data in each of the six countries. Participants received an information sheet about the project and signed an informed consent that was developed by the partnership. Also, a matrix was developed so the facilitators in each country asked the same questions to the group. The results are gathered in the conclusion section of this document but some comments worth being underlined here because there were enunciated in all countries:

Seniors are really motivated, a teacher from UK pointed out *"I saw a really big difference [between teaching senior learners and youth] because they were highly, highly motivated. Usually, it's like pulling teeth to get [young students] to do anything, but the older learners actually wanted homework, they wanted something to work on, because their motivation was just learning for pleasure."*

They need to have an adapted pace in learning sessions. One adult educator from Lithuania underlined that *« If you just have time to turn around with young people, because you give a hint and they do the task before you finish the sentence, shouting 'I've already done', then older people need more attention - we do [note - the task], talk, try it, test it, then I ask again if everything clear ».*

They spend more time studying and are less likely to drop-out of classes as underlined by the French language educator, Elina.

Focus groups identified seniors' difficulties in language learning:

- Listening and Pronunciation
- Lack of confidence
- Terminology associated with learning grammar
- Impaired memory

- Physical impairments (hearing loss, visual)

At the end of the FG, participants received an evaluation form in order to assess the experience.

## In-depth interviews

Each partner conducted two in-depth interviews with language teachers to better understand their needs in term of teaching methodologies with seniors learners. The table below provides an overview of the professionals interviewed during the third phase of this IO:

Country	Gender	Age	Qualification	Experience as teacher	Experience teaching seniors	Location	Self-assessment
FR	F	33	Master in History	7 years	7 years	Paris	6/10
FR	F	36	Certificate of French teaching as foreign language (FLE)	11 years	11 years	Paris	8/10
GE	F	38	Bachelor of Arts in Comparative Linguistics and English as a Foreign Language; Master of Arts in Theoretical Linguistics; CELTA Certificate	13 years	8 years	Leipzig	8/10
GE	F	68	Freelance Teacher for English as a foreign language (Magister English Didactics & Art education)	15 years	3 years	Speksmart München	8,5-9/10
LT	F	21	VU student, English-Norwegian Linguistics, 3 <sup>rd</sup> year	2 years	1 year	Large city	7-8/10
LT	F	60	Teacher of English	37 years	2 years	Rural area	8/10

			language and literature (LEU)				
PL	F	40	English teacher	17 years	10 years	Private lessons – small groups of 2-3 learners	9/10
PL	M	37	English teacher	10 years	5 years	Poznan	8/10
UK	M	53	BSc Hons/CELTA	22 years	18 years	Large UK town	10/10
UK	M	48	BA English Lit. CELTA	21 years	9 years	Online and UK Town	10/10

The detail of the interviews can be found in the reports created by each partner but here are the main lines:

About seniors' motivation:

- Train cognitive skills
- Social aspect of learning a language
- ICT use
- Predominance of English in today's society
- Self-development
- Travels
- Family

The barriers identified are similar to the ones identified during the focus groups.

## Conclusion

The desk research conducted in the framework of the project has allowed the partnership to identify several advices to be implemented when developing the MEANING methodology.

The scientific discipline of social work with the elderly (“geragogy”, which is pedagogy for the elderly) has been established in Germany and successfully formulated some principles for seniors’ learning that are different from the learning of younger people :

- using specific listening exercises.
- working in small groups.
- using a reduced pace so that the course progression is slower compared to courses with younger learners to allow for more repetition and practice.
- using exercises that allow elderly learners to share their life experience and talk about their biography.
- making the goal of the course and the steps to achieving this goal transparent from the start.

The British Council, one of the world’s leading authorities on English education recommends some practices for English teachers:

- Ensuring the students are able to hear by speaking clearly and loudly, and/or turning the volume up on audio clips, repeating when necessary.
- Using large print for class materials and writing clearly on the board, ensuring students are sitting as close as necessary to the board.
- Accounting for the extra time the learners may need to physically move around the room when partaking in group activities.
- Integrating memory exercises into the class, drawing from past experiences to make connections with new information.
- Practising “humanistic” techniques to ensure the learners feel safe and understood
- Avoiding activities that may increase anxiety such as timed tests.
- Reducing the learner’s stress by creating a friendly atmosphere, focusing more on successful communication rather than correcting every mistake.

Interaction with the target population of the project has allowed the consortium to draft some conclusions and identify tips collected to be implemented in the MEANING methodology :

- Implement scaffolding: Supporting the learner and preparing them a bit before you do a listening exercise by brainstorming and reviewing vocabulary
- Need for practical application of the language
- Content should be adapted
- Avoid jargon and technical terms
- Use of visual material and various practical tasks
- Do not overload the learning supports
- Self-assessment should be encouraged

- Assessment should be offered in hard copy (avoid GoogleForm)
- Importance of feedback
- Repetition exercises to cope with impaired memory
- Lessons should be divided in small groups according to age
- Take heterogeneity of the senior population into account
- Need for translation
- Need of communication in the learning process
- Have as many contacts with the studied language as possible (movies, books etc.)
- Use authentic recordings
- Create a community of learners (Facebook group for instance)
- At least one F2F session a week
- Ideal format: 2-3 times a week and the lesson lasts no longer than 45-60 minutes
- Give homework (not mandatory)
- Peer interaction is needed
- Interactivity, the learners an opportunity to express their opinions
- Same level in the same group
- Friendly and social activities
- Theoretical part should take up no more than 30% of the total session time
- Use mother tongue as little as possible

To conclude, these sessions also supported the partnership to identify the skills needed by a language teacher when working with seniors:

- Charisma
- Communication
- Ability to adapt to different situations
- Be able to interest and take into account the age differences of learners
- Should not be arrogant, on the contrary, he or she should be tending to improve and be interested in innovations (i.e. new methods and strategies) in the professional field
- Empathy
- Ability to establish and maintain a connection with the learner
- Patience
- Active listening
- Understanding
- Tolerance
- Entertainment skills (acting, singing)
- Good elocution
- Open-minded

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission.  
This publication [communication] reflects the views only of the author, and the  
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information contained therein



## Partners

