

## DISCUSSION AS A FORM OF EDUCATION IN MODERN UNIVERSITIES

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**Abstract.** The research is devoted to the actual problem of introducing new forms of education in higher educational institutions. The author of the publication, based on a large number of sources, studies the formation and development of discussions as a form of study in European universities, and also gives the results of the survey of Master Degree students and determines the main features of the discussion as a form of learning on their basis, namely: the content orientation of discussion participants' self-realization; communicative basis; presence of a problem situation, logical construction: thesis – argument – refutation or proof of the thesis; organizational completeness. The research also identifies the main types of discussions (lecture-discussion, seminar with elements of discussion, „round table“ etc.) that should be used in modern educational settings.

**Keywords:** discussion; lecture-discussion; seminar with elements of discussion; round table

### 1. Actuality of the problem

The processes taking place in the modern European world are characterized by the strengthening of democratization and integration, the emergence and development of new socio-economic and political relations, which in turn predetermines the need for citizens to acquire such qualities as democracy, tolerance, competence, professionalism, social mobility, ability to effectively solve life problems and to participate in public life. This sets important and responsible tasks ahead of modern higher education, the most important of which is the creation of the most favorable conditions for developing a highly educated, creative and active person. The criterion for evaluating academic achievements of students today is not only the amount of material left in memory, but also the ability to analyze it, generalize, actively use in non-standard (extra-curricular) situation, the ability to independently acquire knowledge, conduct research work. One of the ways to realize these tasks is to improve the forms of education, to direct them to active cognitive activity, to engage them in independent development of problems, facilitated by introduction into the educational practice of high school discussions.

## **2. The purpose of the study**

The purpose of the article is to study the process of formation and development of discussion in the practice of higher education and to determine its main features and application forms into modern universities.

## **3. Formation and development of discussion in European universities**

Discussion (lat. discussio – consideration, research) is a public discussion of some controversial issue or a problem. Discussions began to be used in ancient Greece. In the Vth century B.C. an outstanding scientist Socrates used the question and answer method (dialectical dialogue), which later was named as a „Socratic conversation“. Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle studied the discussion-dialogical aspect of solving the controversial issue. Plato's discussions were based on the development of a system of arguments (evidence). The logical approach to the method was characterized by a rigorous analysis and argumentation; following the methods of formal logic of the discussion, participants came to some final conclusion (Modzalevsky, 2001).

In the medieval discussions *quaestio* (synonyms *disputata quaestio ordinaria, disputatio ordinaria, quaesto solemnis*) was used – the questions for regular discussion. The organizer was a Master who chose the thesis. The objections were offered either by him or by his students, including those who accidentally fell into a discussion. The bachelor supported the thesis with the necessary arguments and answered the questions (*respondens*). The Master could stop the discussion at any time, and personally, by his own word, stop the discussion. However, he could also return to this thesis other time, not supporting, but denying his own point of view (Rabinovich, 1991).

Discussions of medieval universities were inherited by higher educational institutions of a new age. In particular, they were used during the teaching at Kyiv-Mohyla Academy. The proof of this is the advice to study Rhetoric proposed by F. Prokopovich in the section „On the laws and rules of proper conduct of the dispute“, in the course „Logic for training Ukrainian youth who study one and another eloquence for the benefit of religion and the Fatherland, taught ... in Kiev, glorious Orthodox Mohyla Academy in 1706“.

In the XVIIIth – XIXth centuries, requirements for the preparation of students at universities changed, which led to changes in the forms of study. The main link of the didactic cycle was a lecture. As a substitute for medieval discussions, the seminars appeared: they meant the discussion of the particular problem. The purpose of such a discussion is to teach students rhetoric and with the help of theses to be able to expose the false arguments which are put forward by the participants. In the XVIIIth century workshops became widely used in the preparation of philologists for the purpose of interpreting texts, and in the XIXth century they were introduced into the study of Theology and Jurisprudence (Khizhnyak, 2003).

At the end of the XIXth – early XXth century in the high school two directions in the method of conducting a seminar and a practical lesson were formed: democratic, with high activity of students and authoritarian; such division was preserved during the XXth century.

#### **4. The current state of the problem under investigation**

In modern pedagogical science, there is no single point of view regarding the nature of the discussion, as the didactic category. Some authors consider it as a form of organization of education, emphasizing the peculiarities of the discussion associated with additional organizational requirements (the formation of student groups, the placement of participants in the audience, etc.). Other researchers consider the discussion as a method of learning, but attribute to different groups. Thus, a Polish scientist V. Okon, classifying the methods for their didactic purpose, includes it in a group of methods of assimilating knowledge. A Russian scientist T. Ilyin calls a group of methods, which includes a discussion, methods of gaining new knowledge, consolidating and developing skills and abilities. A Ukrainian scientist O. Savchenko emphasizes that the discussion involves the organization of communication and speech activities, therefore, it refers to verbal teaching methods (Clarin, 1998: 130).

In our research, we consider the discussion as a form of study at a high school. The main features of which are: 1) meaningful orientation of the discussion participants' self-realization – communication for the sake of in-depth problem study while searching various means for expressing one's own thoughts; 2) a communicative basis – the acquisition of knowledge by students during communication with each other and the teacher while working in a particular group in order to perform a collective task, while developing a general group approach and observing the rules of public search activity; 3) presence of a problem situation created by a discussion question; 4) logical construction of the method: thesis – argument – refutation or proof of the thesis; 5) organizational completeness: the creation of a problem situation – its discussion – the adoption of a coherent solution – summing up.

So, the first feature of the discussion is *the content orientation of students' self-realization*. Interaction during the discussion is not based on the statements of its participants in turn, but on meaningful communication for the sake of in-depth problem study while searching various means for expressing their own thoughts; in particular, addressing students to one another and a teacher for in-depth and versatile discussion of ideas, points of view, and problems. During the discussions, it is possible to model a wide variety of social situations, looking for different means to solve them.

The contact between the participants of the discussion is not directly related to the subject matter of the study, but due to it, a large number of students are involved in the discussion, that increases the perception of new information, new points of view, and these developing personality factors are directly realized on the material

being considered. Therefore, at the first stage of the educational discussions use, the teachers' efforts are concentrated on the formation of discussion procedures, and at the next stages, the teacher focuses on the problem of identifying different points of view, opinions, ways of argumentation, their comparison and compilation of more comprehensive and multidimensional vision of events and phenomena, going out of the given situation, searching for personal content. The more students learn to think, based on opposing comparisons, the greater their creative potential (Clarin, 1998: 185). From here – attention to the discussion not only as to a means of in-depth work on the content of the subject, but also as to expanding the boundaries of the actual material, the creative use of the knowledge gained.

The second feature of the educational discussion is *the communicative basis* and the dialogic position, realized in the special organizational efforts and the atmosphere of communication, which is supported by all the participants of the discussion. A number of scientists – V. Popova, O. Puchko, N. Toptišina, V. Skalkina, N. Yanisova, consider the academic discussion as a special type of communication and study its psycholinguistic aspect. According to these scholars, the academic discussion is a group dialogue with a large number of participants who spontaneously are included in conversation, addressing one another with clarifying issues, denying, complementing each other. The effectiveness of the discussion depends on each of them, which allows to use the training time as efficiently as possible. The above mentioned researchers determine the following psycholinguistic peculiarities of the educational discussion:

1. **Bilateral character.** During the discussion the interlocutor acts as a speaker, then as a listener, who must respond to replicas and statements of other communicants. That is, the discussion is impossible without mutual understanding, which requires the participants' bilateral speech activity. 2. **Fidelity.** The discussion is known, to be in direct contact with participants who are well aware of the conditions under which communication takes place. That is, the discussion as a group dialogue involves visual perception of interlocutors, which is supplemented by nonverbal means of communication (facial expressions, gestures, eye contact, poses of interlocutors). With their help, he who speaks, reveals his desires, thoughts, doubts, assumptions, consents or, conversely, disagreements. 3. **Situationality.** The educational discussion is situational, therefore its content can often be understood only taking into account the situation in which it occurs, that is, there is a clear correlation between the educational discussion and the situation. 4. **Thematic as correlation of participants' statements with the general topic of discussion,** which has a certain communicative organization. First of all, there is clearly a general theme in it, which, in turn, is divided into a number of subthemes or microthemes. 5. **Connectivity, consistency, logic.** These qualities of educational discussion are realized in the development of the idea of the main phrase by clarifying the thought, supplementing it, explaining, denying, argumenting, counter-argumenting, etc. 6. **Emotional color.** Speech in the

discussion is usually emotionally colored, as the speaker transmits his thoughts, feelings, attitudes toward what is being said. This is reflected in how lexical-grammatical tools are selected in the structure of replicas in intonation design, and so on. 7. Spontaneity. The linguistic behavior of each participant of the educational discussion is largely determined by the speech behavior of the partner. Replica exchange is fast enough. That is precisely what causes spontaneity and unpreparedness of speech actions (Toptigina, 2001).

Despite the dialogic, communicative basis, the discussion is not a „pseudo discussion“ or a „pseudo-search“ of the decisions that are known to the teacher in advance and can be considered in the usual way. The unchanging didactic orientation and impetus for discussion is the following feature of discussion methods: the creation of a problem situation with the help of discussion. Questions that are proposed to the discussion participants can be divided into four groups: 1) ones which contain several theoretical positions and put forward by different scholars. Students need to support a certain thesis and prove its legitimacy. Such questions require work with additional literature, 2) ones aimed at analyzing a fact that contains a direct contradiction. When answering such questions, the discussion participants are divided into two groups and defend the chosen position; 3) questions aimed at the development of theoretical provisions: students are invited to predict the probable course of events under various circumstances. The peculiarity of this group of questions is that the science gives no answer to them. The latter is conditional, it can not be verified.

The next feature of the discussion is its *logical construction*: thesis → argument → refutation or proof of the thesis. In the process of learning, this feature is revealed in the orientation of students to identify the causes and conditions of a phenomenon occurrence, the definition of peculiarities of its development, justification of significance and consequences. Similar to the stages of individual setting and solving the problem, there is a sequence of stages of its group solving: 1) the search and determination of the problem; 2) the formulation of the problem; 3) analysis of the problem in order to identify the facts and circumstances associated with it; 4) attempts to find a solution of the problem. They can make a long process, which includes: discussion, data collection, involvement of external sources of information, etc.; 5) formulating the conclusions, discussing them, checking and making the final decision. The given sequence is not the only option for group problem solving, but also is the most deployed (Clarin, 1998: 199).

In practice, there are discussions in which the problem is posed or occurred spontaneously during the training session; in addition, verification of conclusions, as well as the adoption of a final decision or decision is not always possible, and the teacher emphasizes the conditional, working nature of the conclusions and the completion made. Thus, in educational process, the teacher focuses on one or several key stages of problem solving.

Teachers focused on developing the creative thinking of their students offer to organize the discussion in such a way that students could have an opportunity to make decisions independently, analyze the ideas and approaches that they encounter, and build actions in accordance with their decisions.

The last feature of the discussion is the *organizational completeness*: the creation of a problem situation → its discussion → the adoption of a coherent decision → summing up. The discussion can be organized in several ways. In this case, the teacher's work consists of: 1) creating conditions for the emergence of a problem situation; 2) motivating participants to formulate the problem; 3) managing the search process: using auxiliary questions and tools, stimulating students to observe, compare, apply previously acquired knowledge for a new situation; 4) correcting the conclusion. The activity of the discussion participants consists of: 1) awareness of the inability to apply a known method for solving the problem situation; 2) the formulation of the problem; 3) making assumptions; 4) checking them (comparing, analyzing and differentiating features, comparing their own observations with the new task); 5) formulating the conclusion. An educational discussion, organized in this way, can be used both in the study of humanities subjects, and such subjects as Physics, Mathematics and Natural sciences.

In order to understand how necessary it is to use discussions in contemporary universities and what kind of discussions are of interest to young people, we conducted a survey among undergraduate students (full time study) at Berdyansk State Pedagogical University.

153 respondents took part in the experiment. They were asked the following questions: 1. What form of training is most often used at the university? Students responded as follows: lecture – 87%; seminars – 67%; practical lesson – 20%.

Next, we proposed to answer the following questions: 2. What form of training do you think is the most effective, and which one is the most interesting to you? And we got the following results: the most effective forms of study students consider: practical classes – 47%; interactive forms (discussions, solution of practical tasks) – 33%; seminars – 13%. The most interesting for students were: interactive classes (discussions, disputes, practical exercises, trainings) – 67% and practical classes – 13%. Instead, lectures, seminars and video sessions were interesting only for 0.7%. Then we were interested in the students' opinion concerning the number of people studying: 3. What, in your opinion, is the most effective form of training in the number of participants: frontal, group or individual? Answers were distributed as follows: group form attracted 60%; individual one – 40%; front one – 0%.

The next question offered to students was : 4. What kind of training would you like teachers to use more often? The results were as follows: interactive lessons attracted 60% of students; practical classes and lectures – 13% and video lessons – 0.7%.

Analyzing the answers to the first questions we came to the conclusion that students chose lessons aimed at active communication and exchange of ideas,

work in groups, as well as the development of practical skills young people would need in their future life. Thus, the discussion, as a form of study at the university, was very relevant and necessary in the modern educational process. However, we wondered whether young people could participate in the discussions and what they knew about this form of education. For this purpose, we offered students to define the concept of a discussion. It should be noted that 100% determined the content, and most of the answers were reduced to „discussing any problem.“

Then we asked young people if they are able to participate in the discussions? And they got the following answers: 80% answered „Yes“, 20% answered „Not always (when I have enough information)“. The last question the students answered was: „What forms of discussion do you know?“ The results were as follows: 33% named debate; 20% named round table; 1% chose conference-discussion; 46% did not answer the question.

Therefore, despite the fact that most young people know the definition of the discussion and would like to participate in it and receive knowledge in this way, almost half of the students do not know how to organize different kinds of discussions.

So we decided to combine the most commonly used forms of learning with the most interesting ones and to offer several forms of discussion that can be used at any lesson, namely, a lecture, a discussion, a seminar, a „round table“, a discussion-conference, etc.

*Lectures and discussions* are used when the lecturer when presenting the material addresses the audience with specific questions that require a brief and quick response. The full discussion at the lecture cannot be used, but the discussion question, which causes several responses in the audience, creates a psychological atmosphere of collective reflection and readiness to listen to the lecturer's answers carefully. While conducting a lecture-discussion, unlike a traditional lecture, the teacher not only listens to students' answers, but also organizes a free exchange of views in intervals between logical sections. It enlivens the educational process, activates cognitive activity of students, allows the teacher to manage the collective thought, using it in order to persuade, overcoming the negative settings and erroneous thoughts of some students.

*Seminar with elements of discussion* is a form of the seminar, the components of which are the contradiction, the controversial problem, the variety of ways to solve it, the competence of the participants. Students come to class preparing responses to the seminar questions and having their own attitude to the issues which are observed. The main stages of such a seminar are the choice of the problem for discussion; the problem study; holding the discussion (competence of the participants); summing up the results. According to a Russian psychologist B. Badmaev, a student survey in 4-6 months after the seminars proved that the majority remembered the seminars where the discussion was held, memorizing both the issues discussed and the individual thoughts of colleagues (Badmaev, 1999).

*Seminar – „a round table“* is a form of a seminar, which is based on several points of view, the discussion of which leads to a common position or decision for all participants. „Round tables“ are organized more often for discussing a particular problem by representatives of various political or scientific directions. The exchange of opinions allows to find common points of view, which in the future can serve as a search for common conclusions. In educational process, the method of the round table is used to increase the efficiency of students' acquisition of theoretical problems by considering them in various scientific aspects with the participation of specialists from different fields.

Such seminar has three stages: 1) preparatory: the choice of the topic for discussion (the discussed issue is not unanimous, is not completed, but necessarily problematic); development of the lesson's objectives; invitation of specialists (with two requirements: to be a specialist and have opposite points of view or attitudes (priest and atheist, farmer and shareholder-collective farmer), counseling students, preparation of premises, development of a meeting plan, 2) the problem discussion: introduction, identification of positions of groups participants, formulation of the main points, the problem discussion with specialists; 3) summing up: the characteristics of the microgroups activity, the formulation of the only position, to which the participants came or came closer during the meeting; to name suggestions that arose during the discussion, to determine the time and form of return to them.

The method of „a round table“ is used in other forms, for example, within the framework of the student's educational and methodological conference. The main thing is to choose a common theme that requires a deeper, more comprehensive examination in the interests of students' professional training. Students and teachers from one specialty but from different universities can be involved. In higher education practice international „round tables“ are also often used.

## **5. Conclusion**

Hence, discussions at a high school can be applied in both traditional and non-traditional forms. Their effectiveness is determined by the extent to which students have been able to intensify their thinking and to what extent they have increased the quality of their learning, raised their interest in the issues studied and their desire to plunge deeper into the process of further work with literature. At the same time during the discussion it is necessary to adhere to the principles of equality of the discussion participants, adequacy of perception, relying on life experience and a steady orientation of the discussion.

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