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The Impact of the Ways of Educational Process at University on Forming Opinions by Young People

<http://dx.doi.org/10.12775/PBE.2016.070>

Abstract

The presented article focuses on examining selected forms of educational process at universities and the subsequent acting of the inquired university students regarding the participation in deciding processes in society. It is therefore necessary to analyze if the discussion related to the events on the Slovak political scene carried out during lectures and seminars at universities constituted the influence of scholarly environment on forming the voter judgment on Parliamentary Election in Slovakia of the inquired university students. It is necessary to search and examine these connections through a theoretical definition of the given issue and subsequent empirical analysis of the asked exploratory question. The theoretical part characterizes the basic notions related to the educational process, aimed at the method of university teaching and with an emphasis on the ways of realisation and the course of university education. Within the empirical part it is possible to determine the focus of the discussion carried out at lectures and seminars at universities according to the respondents' opinions. The created outline of the focus of educational process at university allows for drawing out the conditionality of the school's impact on voting decisions of the inquired university students in the Parliamentary Election in Slovakia which took place on 5th March 2016. Data were obtained through a questionnaire prepared in advance. Data collected in April 2016 were consequently processed by the statistics software SPSS 20 and interpreted based on the results of univariant, bivariant and multivariant analysis. The respondents were 200 students studying at universities in Slovakia.

Keywords: discussion, education, curriculum, university student, university teaching

Introduction

Throughout the time of unstoppable and constantly progressing lifecycle, every person goes through individual phases of evolution, as well as the development of one's personality. However, forming the human personality is not a coincidental process. Its course is determined and affected by multiple factors, the effectiveness of which represents in various degrees the essential condition for integration and the subsequent participation of an individual in basic, necessary for life in a society, interactions related to the matter of surviving the everyday reality.

The development of the human personality is inherently accompanied by the course of the educational process. The education of individuals can be characterized through the participation of people that are being educated, mostly young ones in education carried out in the school environment. Education is the school environment realized by obtaining new and essential knowledge for elementary social interactions. For that reason it is necessary to pay more attention to examining the possibilities and ways of the course of the educational process at different levels of the existing, valid and accepted system of education. As we consider the educated generation of young people to be an important group of population, it is necessary to focus our research on the process of education at universities. Education carried out in the university environment poses the highest level of possibilities for individuals to gain information. Besides obtaining new information, people that are being educated, constantly form, in varying degrees, their personalities as well. A young person comes into contact with attitudes and opinions, which he can partly accept as his own and subsequently adjust his behavior and acting to these newly-found beliefs.

The educational process in the university environment happens in multiple ways. It is therefore necessary to focus mainly on education combined with a discussion aimed at current events in society and the discussion's influence on the behavior and acting of people that are being educated. Discussing different social phenomena, processes, events or activities during the university education can establish raising interest in the discussed issues in university students. The events on the Slovak political scene are also a significant topic of discussions in the educational process at universities, especially at the time when different types of election take place. Therefore, we have to ask ourselves whether the process of university education carried out by discussing the events on the Slovak political scene takes part in the subsequent voter judgement of the inquired university students.

Educational process

If we focus on exploring the essence of the educational content, we emphasize the fact that in the current educational system the topic of human rights, the democratic state based on the rights and obligations of citizens, as well as accentuating the tolerance towards differences, does not occur in a sufficient extent and amount (Hoffmanová, 2005). The existing educational system specializes to a bigger extent mostly in achieving a relatively wide range of knowledge. For that reason a number of areas are included in the educational process only marginally and partially. However, it is also necessary to establish that partial including of certain areas in the education content makes more space for analyzing them by an informal curriculum or by educating individuals in different ways. As further stated by Hoffmanová (2005), a young person should have basic knowledge, as well as resulting skills related to life in today's multicultural society and should also take responsibility for his own decisions.

We need to remark that education plays a big role in the development of identity of the person that is being educated (Edwards-Usher, 1994). The educational process focuses mainly on individuals that are being educated and their integration into necessary interactions in society, which is possible due to the development of their personality traits.

Education in the school environment

The educational process is usually connected with the school environment. "Education is an important target domain at all levels of school. In high and higher schools, education transfers to the field of the person's preparation for the qualified practice of a chosen profession. The role of high schools and universities is to create conditions, where students can absorb information, abilities and skills necessary for the practice of a specific profession" (Vančíková, 2011, p. 19). Education carried out in high schools and at universities to a large extent facilitates the preparation of young people for their future profession and their professional life as adults. On the other hand, the educational process in high schools and at universities can not only be restricted to the preparation for the future profession. We consider the knowledge obtained in the process of school education to be one of the possibilities and ways to integrate young people into the full life in society. Only constant recognition, as well as complex and deep knowledge of the principles of elementary social interactions determinates the integration of individuals into current social events. By participating in educa-

tional activities, most often in the school environment, a young person gains a deep knowledge, as well as a lot of information necessary for the development of his acquired abilities and experience, which can be subsequently used for the essential participation of an individual in decision-making processes influencing the life of every person.

The interaction between students and their teacher is an important part of the educational process. For that reason the teacher should accentuate the course of education based on following approaches (Kolář-Šikulová, 2007):

- 1) The content of education – it is important that the previous experience of each student is being used during the process of obtaining new information, which can make the whole process faster and more effective.
- 2) Methods and organizational forms – the educational process should be based on applying and preferring the results of a person's own activity, founded mainly on personal experience with a particular matter presented by a student. Therefore the often-used methods of education should be especially dialogues, discussions, experimenting and solving presented problem situations. For that reason the interaction between a teacher and a student, several students, as well as between students themselves in the teaching process is highly important.
- 3) Perceiving the student's position – a teacher should actively perceive the personality of a student and his position in the classroom. That means that the reflection of individual abilities and knowledge is equally important for every student, which enables him to understand their extent and depth, as well as the extent and depth of his visions and experience. Active communication between a teacher and a student broadens and deepens knowledge of the person that is being educated.

Teaching is a process characterized by an active engagement of both the teacher and the student in its course. However, the teacher is the person responsible for the way in which his student gains a wide spectrum of information. It is therefore necessary to emphasize the importance of the extent of the teacher's knowledge. It is the teacher's knowledge that becomes the essential pillar for the constant development of knowledge of the individuals that are being educated. Moreover, we cannot forget to pay attention to the importance of perceiving the student as an individual who is unique, and to the fact that the teacher is able to adjust the educational communication to his student's abilities. On the other hand, it is necessary to point out that in bigger groups treating each student with an individual approach becomes difficult, which is why it is essential for the teacher to find active communication with his students important.

For that reason an adequate choice of educational methods appears to be highly important for the educational process. The most effective educational methods are dialogues and various discussions related to the topic of education, as well as attitudes and opinions of the people that are being educated.

As added by Bajtoš (2003), the educational process should not be based only on one-sided explanation by the teacher, but mainly on an active conversation based on the students' perception of education, when the teacher's exploration focuses on the students' interest in the education content, as well as the possible problems with adopting it. We need to accentuate the importance of educational process as an active process, which is aimed at not only absorbing necessary knowledge, but particularly at an active participation of students in the educational process. It is therefore necessary to highlight also the teachers' interest in communicating with their students. In this way, the teacher will be able to get to know his student's personality and to subsequently adjust individual educational activities to the needs and interests of his students.

The dialogue between the teacher and the student is characterized by an active interaction of both sides. The previous experience of both the teacher and the student displays during mutual discussion. The teacher impersonates the culture that he brings over into the educational process as well. This culture is being presented in an objective way and refers to the real character of the world that it lives in (Porubský, 2007). For his students, the teacher's personality represents the source of information connected with a wide spectrum of areas in society. The teacher also facilitates the basic features of a culture that he is a part of to his students. That is also a way that reproduction, reconstruction and preservation of the particularities of specific cultures can happen.

The university education

The university education is one of the levels of the educational system. It is characterized by "the type of institutions, university legislation and internal norms, organizational structure, academic culture, the structure of educational programmes and the character of educational processes" (Slavík et al., 2012, p. 12). The university education is viewed as a process that is carried out based on previously approved and valid legislation. It is possible to understand the university education as a specifically happening process based on its own institutional integration into society. On the other hand, Slavík (2012) points out the differentiation and usage of the term "university teaching", since this "term is narrower, it indicates an activity limited to a specific time and place, that is

defined in curriculum and is usually bound to a specific object, module, course or another organizational form” (Slavík et al., 2012, p. 12). It is also necessary to underline the differentiation of university teaching understood as the actual content of education. University teaching is usually being carried out by a specific way of explaining a particular matter at lectures and seminars. The content of education is often connected with the term “curriculum“. The definition of curriculum is the focus of our next chapter.

If we focus our attention on the educational process at university, it is necessary to note that the organizational form of university education can be most commonly carried out in the following ways (Rohlíková-Vejvodová, 2012):

- 1) Frontal teaching – it is connected with mass teaching, where the content of education is being brought to a given group of students. One-way communication of a teacher towards his students is usually typical, although mutual communication between both sides of the educational process through interactional dialogical methods is possible as well.
- 2) Group teaching – it is based on the students’ work in groups set in advance that were created spontaneously or by the teacher’s orders. Students most often discuss various issues, they suggest solutions for their assigned tasks, cooperate, together they oversee the results of their work, search for possible mistakes or defaults in the results of their previous individual, as well as group activities and they become familiar with other students’ experience.
- 3) Individualized teaching – adjusting the given tasks to individual abilities of each student. Students are usually provided with space for their independent studies combined with individual consultations with their teacher.
- 4) A combination of two or more organizational forms – while teaching a certain subject at university, it is possible to combine several organizational methods of education.

The aforementioned university education is viewed as a process of gaining new information in different ways described above. The usage of these ways often depends on the content of education, as well as its recipients and their number. We find the group teaching or a combination of two or more organizational forms to be the appropriate option of an organizational form of university education. On the other hand, the mentioned combination of organizational forms can become difficult to prepare and to carry out, where a rigorous and exact plan would be necessary.

We agree with Ellington, according to whom a university teacher should be oriented at the following activities (Ellington, 2000):

- a) examining the content of what his students learn;
- b) setting adequate goals of education;
- c) using optimal methods of education;
- d) setting optimal methods of students' evaluation;
- e) reflecting his own educational methods of the educational process;
- f) constant progressing and improving of the results of his work;
- g) constant educating and development of his personality.

For practicing the profession of a university teacher is important that the teacher is able to interpret the content of education for his students by using adequately chosen methods of education. Constant educating of university teachers, enabling them to use the methods of education more critically and more reflectively, is necessary as well.

For university teachers it is necessary to know the right ways of passing knowledge on to their students, an understandable presentation of the content of education, its realization, review, analysis and, last but not least, its evaluation, which is how the goals of education are achieved (Podlahová et al., 2012). The university teacher must present the content of education in an appropriate and adequate way that is understandable for the people that are being educated.

The content of education

The process of gaining knowledge characterized as education is most often being defined mainly by its content. The content of education is usually being associated with the term “curriculum“, which can be defined by the following general typology (Čabalová, 2011):

- 1) The narrow definition of curriculum – contains a plan of education recorded in writing and including the basic ways or strategies of achieving and fulfilling the required goals of education.
- 2) The wide definition of curriculum – includes all that the individual gains in the educational process, therefore experience as well. In this sense the educational process is influenced not only by the school environment, but also by the social environment.

We can establish that the focus, but mostly the essence of education contains a complex of specific activities and mainly knowledge that conditions the forming of the human personality. If we define curriculum as the content of education, it is necessary to differentiate between its narrow and wide definition, which results in a more detailed characterization and specification of the content of education. Under the narrow definition of curriculum we understand

the created educational schemes necessary for conceptualization and unification of the content of education. Educational schemes are considered to be the necessary condition of realizing education at all levels of the school system. Equally important is the wide definition of curriculum that contains not only the absorbed knowledge, but also other abilities gained by an individual in the process of socialization. The importance of the social environment for obtaining knowledge is also a part of the wide definition.

There is also a distinction between the formal and the informal curriculum. The formal curriculum is connected with formal activities performed during education in the school environment. The informal curriculum is usually represented by leisure activities performed by the people that are being educated (Kelly, 2009). Educational activities performed during the educational process in the school environment are included in valid documents that characterize the quantitative side, as well as the content of education that the students should adopt.

Veverková also points to the existence of the formal and the informal curriculum, but she complements this typology in a following way (Veverková, 2002):

- 1) Formal curriculum – includes goals, as well as means and related organization of the educational process. A part of the formal curriculum is also the actual realization of the educational process connected with reviewing and evaluating its results.
- 2) Informal curriculum – contains activities and experience of the students during extracurricular activities organized by their school (for example clubs, student competitions, excursions, trips).
- 3) Hidden curriculum – consists of the students' experience that belongs to neither the formal, nor the informal curriculum. The experience is usually formed accidentally, based on social interactions between the teacher and his students, between the students themselves, as well as other abilities, knowledge and skills that the student gains outside the school environment.
- 4) Zero (missing) curriculum – it is related to the existing phenomena and processes in the society that we do not pay much attention to.

We consider the described classification to be appropriate, since defining the curriculum only by formal and informal activities does not fully reflect the compactness and variety of versions and forms of the educational process. Hidden and zero curriculums are portrayed by the educational process at university. University education is characterized also by spontaneous interactions between

the teacher and his students that may reflect the current events in the society. The most common version of spontaneous interactions in the educational process at university is the discussion related to the current phenomena and processes.

Empirical research

The area of the pedagogical research of many social processes and phenomena associated with education is characterized by using a wide spectrum of theoretical approaches to the examined issues. Equally important is the creation, analysis, verification and broadening horizons of the educational process based on rigorous empirical research of many phenomena that participate in the determination of the overall character of elementary interactions that happen within basic social institutions carrying out education.

The forms and methods of the empirical research in pedagogy are diverse. The analysis of the given research question aims at determining the conditions leading to the formation of the impact of university environment on forming attitudes and opinions by the inquired university students in connection with Parliamentary Election in Slovakia, which took place on 5th March 2016.

Used methods and respondents of the research

By specifying the ways of the educational process at university we focus on the importance of discussing certain social phenomena and processes for the inquired university students. We chose 200 university students to be respondents in our research. The comprehension of the given issue is possible through quantitative methods of research. For that reason, to obtain data for our research, we used a questionnaire prepared in advance. Data were processed by the statistics software SPSS 20. Within analyzing the given research question connected with examining the formation of voter judgment of the inquired university students in the school environment, we find it adequate to first examine the focus and presence of discussion in the educational process at universities based on first-degree classification of data. The subsequent bivariate and multivariate analysis of data maps the presence of statistical dependence among the examined variables.

Analysis and interpretation of the obtained data

Based on the theoretical analysis in the previous chapter we focus our attention on the course of the educational process at university. One of significant ways of

realization of university education is giving students the opportunity to actively discuss various issues. As we perceive the group of university students as a generation that should gradually participate to a large extent in crucial social interactions, it is necessary to explore whether the inquired university students discuss chosen social issues at their lectures and seminars. However, at lectures with a large number of students present, it is not possible to include all students, so the following question included potential passively participating students as well.

Table 1. Discussion of chosen topics at lectures and seminars

	No	No (%)	Rather no	Rather no (%)	Rather yes	Rather yes (%)	Yes	Yes (%)
Slovak political scene	23	11,9	51	24,6	62	32,1	40	20,7
Multicultural society	28	14,5	37	19,2	45	23,3	47	24,4
Migration crisis	32	16,6	38	19,7	53	27,5	41	21,2
Slovak nation	34	17,6	54	28,0	45	23,3	34	17,6
Human rights	28	14,5	62	32,1	28	14,5	26	13,5
Minorities in Slovakia	33	17,1	68	35,2	28	14,5	25	13,0

Based on the collected data in Table 1 we indicate that among the inquired university students dominates the possibility of engaging in a discussion on the topic of the events on the Slovak political scene. This fact is caused by the relevance of this topic, since the data were collected at a time when a new Slovak government was being formed based on the results of the prior Parliamentary Election. Furthermore, most of the inquired university students have the opportunity to discuss the issues related to the multicultural society or the migration crisis at their lectures and seminars. The popularity of these two topics is also caused by their relevance, as well as their frequent promotion in the media, which we perceive as a precondition for discussing these topics in the university environment from the respondents' point of view.

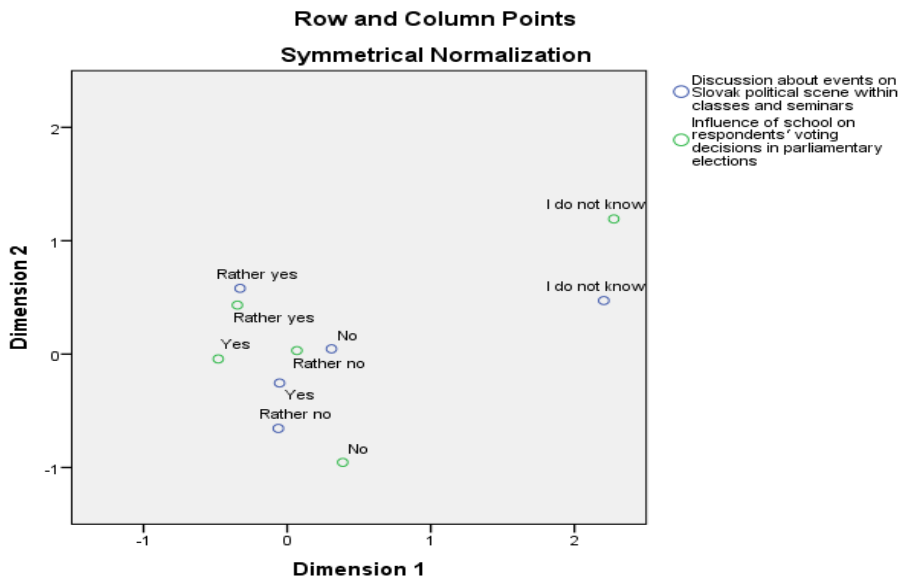
On the other hand, we also need to emphasize the discussion topics that usually do not dominate among the inquired students in university education. Our respondents expressed the absence of active participation in a discussion focused on the position of minorities in Slovakia. National minorities are registered in Slovakia, but there is not much consideration given to their position in the Slovak society. The main emphasis is placed on the Slovak population and the members of national minorities are usually depicted in a negative way. It is also possible to note that the interest in discussing the position of national minorities in Slovakia decreased in connection with the migration crisis, as the overall image of the concept of the multicultural society, as well as the processes of the migration crisis and their consequences are becoming more frequent as topics of discussion in the university environment.

Table 2. Discussion of the events on Slovak political scene at lectures and seminars and the impact of school on voting decision in the Parliamentary Election

Discussion of the events on the Slovak political scene at lectures and seminars		The impact of school on voting decision in the Parliamentary Election						Total
		Without an answer	No	Rather no	Rather yes	Yes	Cannot judge	
Without an answer	Number	3	2	3	0	0	1	9
	%	1,6	1,0	1,6	0,0	0,0	0,5	4,7
No	Number	5	3	8	4	2	1	23
	%	2,6	1,6	4,1	2,1	1,0	0,5	11,9
Rather no	Number	6	12	17	8	8	0	51
	%	3,1	6,2	8,8	4,1	4,1	0,0	26,4
Rather yes	Number	5	3	20	21	11	2	62
	%	2,6	1,6	10,4	10,9	5,7	1,0	32,1
Yes	Number	8	8	7	10	6	1	40
	%	4,1	4,1	3,6	5,2	3,1	0,5	20,7
Cannot judge	Number	0	2	3	1	0	2	8
	%	0,0	1,0	1,6	0,5	0,0	1,0	4,1
Total	Number	27	30	58	44	27	7	193
	%	14,0	15,5	30,1	22,8	14,0	3,6	100,0

As we consider the university environment to be an important socializing factor taking part in forming the personality of the young person, we need to

explore if the university education determinates the attitudes and opinions of our respondents related to voter judgment in connection with the Parliamentary Election in Slovakia. For that reason it appears adequate to explore whether the presence of discussion focused on the events on the Slovak political scene at lectures and seminars reflects the impact of school environment on the respondents' voting decision.



Graph 1. Correspondence map

Based on the data presented in Table 2 we can establish that the school environment has a bigger impact on the inquired university students, who have the opportunity to actively discuss the events on the Slovak political scene and their voting decision in the Parliamentary Election in Slovakia that took place on 5th March 2016. The differences between the group of students who are given the opportunity to discuss the events on the Slovak political scene and the group of respondents who do not have the same opportunity are not that substantial, however there is a certain correlation between the examined variables. The connection between the two presented variables is mainly caused by the fact that the discussion of the events on the Slovak political scene at a time prior to the Parliamentary Election in Slovakia was connected mainly with the pre-election activities of politicians, as well as the potential composition of a newly-formed

government, when the focus of discussion between a teacher and his students or between the students themselves enabled the inquired students to broaden their horizons regarding individual political leaders. On the other hand, we highlight the fact that school rather did not influence the voter judgement of our respondents, which can be justified by a bigger impact of other socializing factors. These results can be also confirmed by the results of the multivariant analysis of data illustrated in the correspondence map below (Graph 1).

Discussion

For an individual, education represents a way to adopt pre-conditions essential for the participation in social phenomena and processes elementary and necessary for everyday life. For that reason, we place emphasis on the educational process happening in the school environment. Since education in the school environment is carried out at different levels, we need to focus our attention on a specific way of education, which is the university education.

By focusing our attention on the specification of the educational process at universities, we point out that its course can gain various versions and forms. On the one hand, the university education focuses on fulfilling a study plan deriving from the curriculum set for the third level of education. The set study plan is usually characteristic when it comes to its content, as well as the extent of knowledge and abilities that a successful university graduate should master. On the other hand, we place emphasis on the actual course of the educational process at university. The realization of education in the university environment is characterized by the possibility to actively integrate students by expressing their thoughts, attitudes and opinions during a discussion with their teacher, as well as a discussion between the students themselves. Since by participating in a discussion the participants learn about each other's attitudes and opinions regarding the topic and content of their discussion, this method can be regarded as an effective way of university education. A discussion at lectures and seminars should, as much as it can, reflect the constantly emergent, expanding and mainly essential processes determining the final version of elementary social interactions that are inevitable in everyday life.

As we focus on the current phenomena and processes in the society, we need to accentuate the results of our research. University lectures, as well as seminars covered mainly the topic of the events on the Slovak political scene. On the one hand, the mentioned statement can be supported by the connection to Parliamentary Election in Slovakia held at the given time. Besides, we can-

not forget about the overall character of politics that participates in making the pre-conditions for creating basic rules and frameworks for human acting and behaviour, which we consider to be the next important reason for including the topic of political events in discussions during university lectures and seminars. Last but not least, we need to digress from the general definition of politics. It is the specificity of the Slovak political scene, in some cases caused by the presence of political leaders, but mainly by their actions and activities, as well as the existence of many political scandals, that becomes one of the leading topics of profound discussions also in the university environment.

On the other hand we need to point out the least frequent topics of chosen social processes present in discussions at university lectures and seminars according to the inquired university students. These topics are the position of national minorities in Slovakia, as well as the issue of human rights. Based on the recorded answers the most absent topic of discussion among our respondents is the position of national minorities in Slovakia. It is the flow of refugees to Europe that rivets attention of the native population of individual European countries on thinking about the position and maybe even a threat to the nation they are a part of. For that reason, the discussion about the position of national minorities is on the decrease among our respondents in the process of university education.

To answer the given research question we explored the existence of connections between the impact of school on voter judgment (in the Parliamentary Election in Slovakia that took place on 5th March 2016) of the inquired university students and the discussion focused on the events on the Slovak political scene. We concluded that there is a bigger impact of school on voting decisions in connection with the mentioned Parliamentary Election among the respondents, who stated that in the educational process at university they have had an opportunity to discuss the events on the Slovak political scene, than among those who have not had the same opportunity. We can therefore ascertain that the university represents an important space for forming attitudes and opinions by a young person. Based on the discussion about the events on the Slovak political scene, the respondents have had an opportunity to learn about the presented activities of individual politicians or political parties and their importance for their potential performance in the parliament. Despite that, we cannot forget to point out other aspects that influence forming a voter judgement by the inquired university students. Within this context, we emphasize the fundamental role of the activities of individual politicians, which the respondents form their opinions about based on information presented by the media, as well and

the fact that the discussion in the school environment focused on the events on the Slovak political scene does not need to be in some cases determining for forming the final voting decision.

Conclusion

The phenomena and processes connected with educating the population in the society represent an essential part of pedagogical research focused usually on the education of individuals. Within this context, we concentrate on describing education that is being carried out in the school environment. The realisation of school education at different levels of the educational system brings the focus on describing university education and educational process happening in the university environment.

Within our empirical research of the given issue we inquired 200 university students studying at universities all over Slovakia, who were given a questionnaire prepared in advance. Based on the results of univariant, bivariant and multivariant analysis of data, we can state that adding a discussion related to the current events in the society to the process of university education appears to be an adequate way of enriching the attitudes and opinions of university students. By an active interaction with his teacher, not only does a university student gain extensive knowledge, but there is a gradual profiling of his personality happening as well. In this way an individual learns about the attitudes and opinions of his usually more experienced educator and he also has an opportunity to dispute the attitudes and opinions that are being presented to him. The inquired university students most often have a chance to participate in a discussion at lectures and seminars related to the events on the Slovak political scene. If we explore the impact of school on voting decisions of our respondents, it is necessary to add that an opportunity to actively discuss the events on the Slovak political scene during the university education is one of the ways in which the school influences forming voter judgments and opinions by the inquired young people.

As we consider active communication of a university teacher with his students to be an inevitable pre-condition of effective university education, in further research of the given issue we suggest focusing on forming the interest of university students in the phenomena and processes that are regularly being discussed at lectures and seminars. It is also possible to explore the perception of importance and contribution of a discussion at lectures and seminars from university student's point of view.

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