

**USING SMALL GROUPS IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE  
TRAINING OF NON-PHILOLOGY STUDENTS**

**Abstract:** this article discusses the methodological possibilities of using small group work in foreign language classes at a non-linguistic university. The structure and functions of small groups are analyzed. The forms of speech interaction in small groups are presented.

**Keywords:** foreign language training, small groups, discussion, problem-solving, case study.

At the current stage of social development, the organization of foreign language learning should incorporate methods and formats that promote students' verbal and cognitive activity, and develop leadership skills and argumentative abilities. One option for achieving these goals is to have students work in small groups. Its advantage is that when working collaboratively, discussion is the primary form of communication, and collaborative activities significantly increase student motivation.

A small group has on average from three to fifteen members, but the optimal number of participants is considered to be five [1, p. 223]. The characteristics of a small group are: 1) the joint presence of people in time and space; 2) the formation of a common goal, objectives; 3) common activities; 4) the presence of a group structure, the identification of the leader; 5) determination of the role of each participant; 6) the formation of internal interpersonal relationships in the group; 7) the formation of rules and norms within the small group. The functions performed by small groups may include the exchange of information, decision-making and problem solving. A group can perform either one of the listed functions, for example, the exchange of information, or several functions if the group's task includes solving a problem.

Information exchange without decision-making is the simplest form of verbal interaction in a group and can be used in the initial stages of learning group communication. The "information gap" technique helps to master this type of activity. Initially, as a preparation, you can suggest working in pairs. For example, students are given similar texts describing the biography of a scientist renowned for his or her achievements in a given subject area. The information one student has is missing from another, and these gaps must be filled by asking each other questions. Further complicating the task, you can structure the learning process as follows: students form groups of 4-5, each studying a specific stage of a technological process or the structure of a single component of a complex machine. The groups are then reorganized so that a single group includes people who have studied different stages of the process. Each student shares their portion of the information, while the others try to absorb it, asking clarifying questions and taking brief notes when necessary. As a result of this exchange, each group member should form a coherent picture. The teacher may ask questions regarding all stages of the process to any member of the group or invite a group representative to make a short oral presentation.

A more complex activity is reasoned decision-making. A specialist's effectiveness and level of professionalism are largely determined by their ability to solve work-related problems, including using a foreign language. To develop the corresponding verbal skills, one can use the technique of case studies. Cases can be sourced from professionally oriented newspaper and magazine publications, as well as from situations presented in foreign-language books on the subject. One can use methodically prepared cases or process them oneself for educational purposes. At the initial stages of training, when students have not achieved sufficient fluency, one can offer cases with ready-made solutions for analysis. After studying them in small groups, students can comment on these solutions, expressing their agreement or disagreement with them, if necessary, using prompts containing the necessary clichés.

At more advanced stages of training, unfinished cases can be used. Students, working in small groups, conduct a comprehensive analysis of the available data, formulate the essence of the problem, uncover its causes, and search for a solution. Each group then

presents its solution, and the optimal solution is developed through a group discussion. Cases can address different issues or focus on different aspects of the same problem, forming a single cycle.

To successfully analyze cases and solve problems, certain preliminary work is necessary. First and foremost, it's essential to ensure a solid understanding of the terminology and speech patterns used to initiate a conversation, express one's own opinion, ascertain the opinion of the other person, agree or disagree with it, persuade, make suggestions, offer advice, and so on. Furthermore, the group leader must be able to steer the discussion in the right direction, keep the conversation on track, call for order when necessary, and maintain the rules. Preliminary mastery of the necessary responses can be achieved through situational microdialogues that require appropriate responses. Initially, participants are asked to choose a response from several suggested options, then they are given open-ended microdialogues in which they must respond independently, without prompts.

As for the group leaders, they can be appointed by the teacher or elected by the group members themselves. First of all, they are the most active students who have a fairly high level of proficiency in the foreign language. On the one hand, this is good because they have a strong opinion and are able to formulate thoughts, but on the other hand, there is a danger of their excessive dominance and more modest or slower students will not take a direct part in the discussion of the problem. To avoid this, it is necessary to develop certain rules for conducting discussions and to orient the group leaders so that they try to involve everyone as much as possible.

The composition of the groups can be permanent or temporary, depending on the volume and nature of the tasks, but it is recommended to change the roles in the group over time. Ideally, each student should strive to fulfill the role of the leader and successfully cope with it. In this case, the language training of future specialists can be considered as effective as possible.

### ***References:***

[1] Hybels S., Weaver R. L. Communicating effectively. – New York: McGraw-Hill, 1995. – 485 p.

© I.P. Makarenko, 2026