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Guided Imagery as an academic discipline: Educational technologies in the development of personal maturity and creative thinking of students

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Abstract. The relevance of the study is conditioned by the growing interest of pedagogy and psychology in the use of guided imagery as an educational technology that can contribute to the development of personal maturity and creative thinking of students. In the context of training future psychologists, the search for innovative approaches to the development of their creativity and emotional competence is of particular importance. The purpose of the study was to identify the influence of guided imagery as an academic discipline on the development of personal maturity and creative thinking of students of psychological specialities. The methodological basis was the use of the guided imagery method (katathym-imaginative psychotherapy), which involved working with controlled mental images and subsequent reflection. The study involved 30 students of the "Psychology" speciality of the Kyiv University of Intellectual Property and Law, who during the semester took a course using basic symbols ("House", "Flower", "Clouds", "Treasure", "Mountain", "Road"). A set of psychodiagnostic techniques was used to assess the dynamics of personal characteristics: Torrance Test of Creative Thinking, a method for determining the level of personal maturity, life orientation, Level of Subjective Control, and Hardiness Test. It has been established that after completing the guided imagery course, students showed a statistically significant increase in originality and flexibility of thinking, level of reflection, responsibility, awareness of life goals, and internalisation. Changes in the development of emotional competence and psychological stability were analysed, which confirmed the effectiveness of the method in the development of personal maturity. Practical recommendations for integrating guided imagery into the training plans of psychologists have been developed. The practical value of the research lies in the possibility of using its results by teachers of psychological disciplines and specialists in the educational sphere to improve the quality of professional training of students

Keywords: therapeutic interaction; pedagogical innovation; creativity; personal growth; reflection; psychological training

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INTRODUCTION

The problems of forming personal maturity and developing creative thinking of students are becoming increasingly relevant in the context of the transformation of the higher education system in Ukraine. The transition to a competence-based learning model involves not only mastering students' professional knowledge, but also developing flexible skills, emotional competence, reflexivity, and the ability to be creative. In this context, innovative educational technologies, in particular, methods of dramatic pedagogy and guided imagery, are effective means of ensuring the holistic personal and professional development of future specialists. The phenomenon of guided imagery as a separate academic discipline in higher education has not yet been sufficiently studied, which causes the need for special research.

In the scientific literature, there is a growing interest in using dramatic and imaginative teaching methods as tools for developing key psychological competencies of students. Thus, Y. Hu & J. Shu (2025) investigated the effectiveness of integrating elements of dramatic education into humanities curricula. The researchers have found that the inclusion of dramatic exercises in the educational process contributes to the development of critical thinking, communication skills, and the ability to work together. It was stressed that dramatic practices increase student engagement, form the experience of co-creation, and increase the level of internal motivation to learn. However, the study did not reveal the deep psychological mechanisms of these processes, in particular, the role of imaginative experience and emotional reflection. The study by F. Şahin (2021) was more applied in nature and aimed to analyse the impact of creative drama on the cognitive flexibility of students with intellectual disabilities. It was proved that participation in dramatic exercises contributed to the development of fluidity of thinking and skills in finding original solutions in difficult educational and life situations. These results confirmed the universal nature of the impact of dramatic methods on the cognitive sphere, but the question of the possibility of their systematic use in educational programmes for ordinary student groups remained open.

The study by S. Horasan-Dogan & P.T. Cephe (2020) analysed the role of creative drama in the professional training of future teachers. The researchers showed that the involvement of students in dramatic practices contributed not only to increasing the level of pedagogical creativity, but also to the development of emotional competence, empathy, and the ability to self-reflect. This approach ensured the development of students' professional identity, but the researcher focused mainly on the pedagogical, rather than psychological aspects of the process. It remains unclear exactly what mental processes and inner experiences contribute to the personal growth of participants in dramatic learning. In turn, T.B. Arda Tuncdemir (2025) investigated the relationship between the use of creative drama and the development of students' self-efficacy. The researcher concluded that regular participation in dramatic exercises increases self-confidence, creates a sense of competence, and has a positive effect on self-esteem. This finding confirmed

the importance of dramatic technology in maintaining students' psychological well-being. The paper did not analyse the impact of such methods on the development of integrated personality characteristics – such as maturity, integrity, or internal consistency.

There is also a growing interest among Ukrainian researchers in integrating dramatic and guided imagery approaches into the educational process. Thus, L. Naidyonova (2022) examined the psychological mechanisms of students' personal maturity and emphasised the potential of methods of working with mental images for developing emotional stability and self-regulation. The findings confirmed that imagination-based visualisation techniques can be a powerful tool for integrating emotional and cognitive experiences. However, the researcher did not investigate the possibilities of systematic implementation of such methods in the educational process as a separate discipline. N.P. Volkova *et al.* (2021) analysed the role of interactive technologies in the development of students' critical thinking. The researchers noted the high effectiveness of methods that activate imagination, imaginative thinking, and reflection. However, the dramatic component of these technologies was considered only in passing, without a deeper analysis of the symbolic content of educational interaction.

Thus, the analysis of scientific sources for 2021-2025 indicates the presence of a wide range of studies that confirm the effectiveness of dramatic and creative-dramatic methods in the development of cognitive, emotional, and social competencies of students. Researchers from different countries emphasised their positive impact on critical and creative thinking, emotional maturity, and social interaction. However, insufficient attention was paid to the analysis of guided imagery as a separate academic discipline that combines educational, therapeutic, and personal development goals. Questions about the methodological foundations of its implementation in the system of training psychologists, pedagogical conditions for effective application, and the specifics of its impact on the formation of personal maturity and the development of creative potential of students remain unexplored. Given the above, the purpose of the research was a comprehensive study of the potential of guided imagery as an academic discipline in the context of professional training of students of psychological specialties, in particular, the assessment of its impact on the development of personal maturity and stimulating the development of creative thinking.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

To conduct this study, a research project was organised at the Kyiv University of Intellectual Property and Law among students majoring in "Psychology". The sample includes the 4th-year students ($n = 30$), aged from 20 to 22 years, of which 24 were women and 6 were men. All participants were trained in the C4 educational and professional programme "Psychology", educational level "Bachelor". The selection was carried out on the basis of voluntary consent, the

presence of internal motivation for self-knowledge and readiness to master projective and guided imagery techniques. Preliminary training included basic knowledge from the following courses: “General Psychology”, “Practicum in General Psychology”, “Psychodiagnostics”, and “Fundamentals of Psychotherapy”. Classes were held in the format of therapeutic group meetings with the number of participants from 6 to 10 people, which provided a psychologically safe atmosphere and promoted individual and group reflection. The course consisted of 15 classes of 90 minutes each, which took place during one academic semester. The procedures for conducting classes included: familiarising students with symbolic dramatic motives and techniques, performing individual and group exercises with working with internal images, group discussion of experiences and reflections, and integration tasks to consolidate the experience gained. To control the research conditions, standardised conditions for conducting classes were provided: a permanent venue, the same time, a consistent structure of classes, the same methodological materials, and the support of a qualified teacher. This approach helped to unify the influence of external factors as much as possible, ensuring intra-group and inter-group stability, which increased the reliability of the results obtained.

The methodological basis of the study was the method of guided imagery (katathym-imaginative psychotherapy), which combines the use of controlled mental images with subsequent reflection and interpretation of participants' experiences (Leuner, 1984; Leuner & Kottje-Birnbacher, 1994). This approach was based on a combination of psychoanalytic concepts and techniques of working with imagination, which allows activating deep emotional processes, increasing the level of self-knowledge, and stimulating creative thinking. In the educational context, guided imagery is considered as an innovative educational technology that can ensure the development of personal maturity, the development of emotional competence, and the disclosure of students' creative potential. As part of the study, the guided imagery method was used not only as a psychotherapeutic tool, but also as an educational practice that integrates elements of individual and group work. This allowed combining the individual internal dynamics of participants with a collective discussion of symbolic images, contributing to the development of reflection, empathy, and interpersonal communication skills. The use of guided imagery techniques ensured the creation of a safe educational environment in which students could freely explore their own inner experiences, project them onto mental pictures, and gain new experiences of understanding their own “self”. Thus, the chosen methodology allowed combining the psychotherapeutic potential of guided imagery with its pedagogical capabilities, which is especially important for the development of students of psychological specialties of a deep understanding of the mechanisms of personal development and creative self-realisation.

During the course, the basic motifs of the guided imagery were used: (“House”, “Flower”, “Clouds”, “Treasure”,

“Mountain”, “Road”. The motif “House” was considered one of the key motifs used to diagnose and correct the image of the “self”. The “House” acts as a metaphor for the internal structure of a person, where individual elements (floors, rooms, the state of the building) reflect the nature of their mental organisation. For example, an abandoned or destroyed house can symbolise exhaustion and lack of vital resources; a house without doors or windows – difficulties in communication and interpersonal interaction; a spacious and bright house – harmony, internal comfort, and psychological stability. The motif “Flower” was aimed at updating the topic of personal growth, creative potential and self-esteem. The image of a flower allows tracing the dynamics of self-perception – from the hidden potential (bud) to its disclosure (flower in full bloom). The condition and colour of the flower often reflect the level of vital energy and openness to new experiences. Thus, a withered or broken flower may indicate low self-esteem or a sense of inferiority; a brightly bloomed one may indicate inner strength and harmonious development; a closed bud may indicate a still unrealised potential. “Clouds” – this motif reflects emotional processes and the dynamics of affective states. Clouds can be light and bright, indicating emotional flexibility and the ability to regulate feelings, or dark and static, which are interpreted as a projection of anxiety, depression, or internal tension. Working with a motive promotes awareness, verbalisation, and further regulation of emotions. “Treasure” is a technique aimed at identifying hidden internal resources, values, and life orientations of the individual. A treasure can symbolise meaningful relationships, talents, life goals, or spiritual resources. For example, a gold object or jewellery found reflects an awareness of own capabilities; an empty chest – a feeling of emptiness; the appearance of a treasure guard – difficulties in accessing internal resources (in particular, fear of self-expression). In the process of working, the motive contributes to the discovery of new aspects of one's own potential and the development of a sense of competence and strength. The motif “Mountain” represents barriers, difficulties, and life's challenges. The way to overcome obstacles is important: climbing to the top reflects self-confidence and willingness to fight, bypassing the cliff indicates avoiding problems, and retreating can indicate a low level of stress tolerance. A high and inaccessible mountain symbolises difficulties that are perceived as insurmountable, while overcoming it is the dominance of active coping strategies. The motif “Road” symbolises the path of life, orientation to the future and awareness of prospects. The nature of the road (flat, illuminated, winding, or intermittent) indicates a sense of stability or uncertainty in life, and the level of purposefulness of the individual. Thus, a smooth and illuminated road indicates confidence in their own future; a winding or intermittent road indicates doubts and internal instability; a road leading up reflects the desire for development and high ambitions.

The rationale for using these particular psychodiagnostic methods is that they have proven themselves in scientific practice as valid and reliable methods: Torrance Test of

Creative Thinking (TTCT), method for assessing personal maturity, method “Meaningful Life Orientations” (MLO) by O. Leontiev, method “Level of Subjective Control” (LSC), Hardiness Test by S. Maddi. TTCT was used to determine the level of development of creativity, originality and flexibility of thinking (Torrance, n.d.). The study used verbal and figurative subtests, which provided a comprehensive understanding of the creative potential of the individual and its innovative capabilities. Next, the study used the method of investigating the level of personal maturity designed to assess the development of basic value orientations, the ability to self-regulation and reflexivity. Personal maturity within the framework of this approach is understood as the integration of the motivational and semantic sphere, a responsible attitude to own life and readiness for self-development. The method allowed identifying maturity levels and identifying key factors that contribute to or hinder personal growth. Method of MLO by O. Leontiev (StudFiles, n.d.) was used to identify the features of the target orientation, the level of life meaningfulness and subjective responsibility for one’s own choice. The tool was based on the concept of meaning as a system-forming factor of personality and allows assessing the degree of satisfaction with the past, awareness of the present and the presence of long-term life plans, which is an important criterion for psychological well-being. The LSC methodology (Rotter, 1966) in the adaptation of E.F. Bazhyn, was used to investigate the locus of control, that is, the individual’s ideas about the sources of responsibility for the events of their own life. Indicators of internality and externality determine how much a person is inclined to attribute the results of activities to their own efforts or external circumstances. A high level of internality indicates a developed sense of autonomy, the ability to take responsibility and make conscious life choices. The Hardiness Test (Maddi, 2006) was used to assess stress tolerance, uncertainty tolerance, and personal growth in crisis situations. The concept of hardiness includes three key components: engagement, control, and risk acceptance. High scores on these scales indicate an individual’s ability not only to resist stressful influences, but also to transform difficult life circumstances into a resource for development.

The use of these methods facilitated a multidimensional study of the personal characteristics of the study

participants, which allowed obtaining comprehensive empirical data for further analysis of the relationships between creativity, personal maturity, life-meaning orientations, and psychological stability. The study involved two stages: ascertaining (before the start of the course) and control (after the end of the course), which helped to track the dynamics of the development of indicators of creative thinking and personal maturity. The research strategy combined quantitative and qualitative analysis. Quantitative data were subjected to statistical processing (calculation of mean values, comparison of results before and after training exposure), and significance levels were determined using Student’s *t*-test for dependent samples; additionally, the Pearson correlation coefficient was used to establish relationships between indicators. Qualitative analysis included the study of students’ personal reflections, the content of mental images and their symbolic interpretations. The results obtained confirmed the positive dynamics of the development of creative thinking and personal maturity of participants after completing the guided imagery course. The described methodology creates conditions for reproducing research by other scientists under similar conditions. All procedures met the ethical standards for conducting psychological research (American Psychological Association, 2017; The British Psychological Society, 2021). Participants were informed about the goals, conditions, and possible psychological consequences of participating, gave written informed consent, and had the right to opt out at any stage without negative consequences. Confidentiality and anonymity of the results were guaranteed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis of the data obtained at the ascertaining and control stages of the study showed positive dynamics in the development of creative thinking and personal maturity of students (Table 1). In particular, an increase in indicators of originality of thinking, the ability to generate new ideas, an increase in the level of cognitive flexibility and emotional self-regulation was recorded. Students demonstrated greater openness to new ways of solving problems, increased their ability to reflect and understand their own emotional states.

Table 1. Dynamics of indicators of creative thinking and personal maturity of students before and after students master the course “Guided Imagery” (n = 30)*

Indicator	Before the course (M ± SD)	After the course (M ± SD)	p
Creativity (TTCT, general index)	85.3 ± 9.6	98.7 ± 10.2	< 0.01
Originality (TTCT)	21.4 ± 4.3	27.8 ± 5.0	< 0.05
Flexibility of thinking (TTCT)	18.7 ± 3.9	24.1 ± 4.2	< 0.05
Personal maturity	42.5 ± 6.1	49.2 ± 5.8	< 0.05
Meaningful Life Orientations (MLO)	88.9 ± 11.4	96.7 ± 10.1	< 0.05
Subjective control (LSC, internality)	11.2 ± 2.7	14.5 ± 2.9	< 0.05
Hardness Test	65.8 ± 8.2	74.6 ± 7.9	< 0.01

Note: * – data is shown as the mean ± standard deviation (M ± SD); significance levels were determined using Student’s *t*-test for dependent samples

Source: compiled by the authors

The data showed that after completing the course, there was a statistically significant increase in all key indicators, which confirms the effectiveness of guided

imagery as an educational technology for the development of personal and professional competencies of students (Fig. 1).

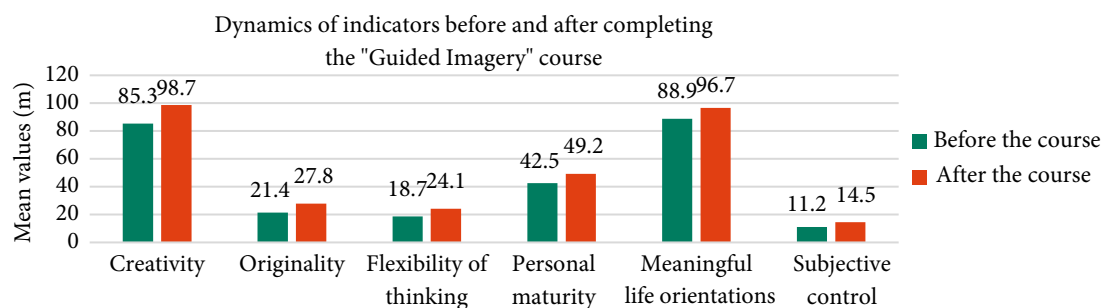


Figure 1. Dynamics of psychological indicators before and after completing the course "Guided Imagery"

Source: compiled by the authors

Analysis of TTCT results showed significant positive changes in the development of students' cognitive characteristics. The average creativity index increased by 15.1%, while the indicators of originality and flexibility of thinking – by 29.9% and 28.9%, respectively, relative to the basic level. If at the beginning of the study the range of results ranged from 72-100 points, then after completing the course it expanded to 90-115 points, which indicates an enrichment of the cognitive repertoire of students, an increase in the ability to associative thinking, and going beyond stereotypical decisions. Standard deviations remained relatively stable (± 9.6 before the course and ± 10.2 after), indicating uniform positive dynamics in most of the sample participants. It is important to note that the increase in creativity indicators was accompanied by changes in other psychological characteristics. Correlation analysis revealed a statistically significant positive relationship between the originality of thinking and the level of motivation to achieve success ($r = 0.43$; $p < 0.05$), and between flexibility of thinking and personal maturity ($r = 0.49$; $p < 0.01$). This indicates the relationship between cognitive and motivational-personal development: the growth of creativity is accompanied by the development of internal motivation, awareness of own potential, and the ability to self-regulate. The results obtained can be interpreted as the activation of divergent thinking, combined with the development of personal qualities necessary for the realisation of creative potential. The growth of creativity indicators not only reflects the development of intellectual abilities, but also confirms the positive dynamics in the field of self-awareness, motivation, and maturity of students, which confirms the complex nature of their psychological growth under the influence of the curriculum.

In the method of studying the level of personal maturity, the average indicator of personal maturity increased by 6.7 points (15.8%), while the standard deviation decreased from 6.1 to 5.8, which indicates a gradual equalisation of development levels within the group. A more detailed analysis showed that the greatest positive changes were observed for the subscale's "reflexivity" (+18.4%) and

"value orientations" (+16.7%), while the dynamics on the scales "self-control" and "social responsibility" were more moderate (+9.3% and +7.8%, respectively). This indicates that the training course primarily stimulated the internal processes of self-knowledge, understanding life priorities, and forming personal autonomy. A comparative analysis of the average values and standard deviations for subscales showed that it was the indicators of reflexivity and value orientations that became the most stable in the group ($SD = 4.9$ and 5.1 , respectively, after completing the course), which indicates an increase in the uniformity of results. A statistically significant positive correlation was found between these two subscales ($r = 0.52$; $p < 0.01$), which indicates the interdependence of the depth of self-reflection and the development of personal values. This connection reflects the integration of cognitive-semantic and emotional-motivational components of personal maturity, which is an important condition for the development of professional competencies of a future psychologist. Qualitative observation data confirm quantitative results. Students were more likely to describe situations in which they showed greater independence in decision-making, awareness of their own boundaries, and responsibility for emotional responses. In reviews of the course, participants noted that the training exercises helped to "see yourself from the outside", "realise that you can manage your condition", "understand what values are really important to me". The results obtained demonstrate the development of a holistic life position, strengthening self-regulation, and deepening the value and semantic sphere of students. This gives grounds to consider an educational programme based on the use of guided imagery as an effective tool for developing personal maturity and professional readiness of future psychologists.

According to the results of the "Life-meaning orientations" method, a noticeable positive dynamic of indicators was observed. The average value of the overall index increased from 88.9 to 96.7 points (+8.8%), while the maximum results reached 115 points (against 102 at the beginning), which indicates an expansion of the range of individual achievements and an increase in the level of life

meaning in more participants. A detailed analysis of the subscale showed that the most pronounced changes were recorded on the “target orientation” scale ($p = 0.04$), where the average value increased by 11.3%, which indicates the development of a clearer vision of the future, certainty of life goals, and strategies for achieving them. Significant positive changes were also found on the “life satisfaction” scales ($p = 0.05$) and “locus of control – self” ($p = 0.03$), which reflects increased internal motivation, a sense of self-confidence and a willingness to take responsibility for life events. Less pronounced, but statistically tendentious changes were noted in the “locus of control – life” scales ($p = 0.07$) and “process of life” ($p = 0.08$), which may indicate a gradual development of the ability to perceive own life as a consistent and meaningful process. A comparative analysis of the distribution of results showed that 67% of participants showed an increase in MLO indicators, 28% – remained within stable values, and only 5% – a slight decrease, which is probably due to individual characteristics of self-esteem or temporary emotional states. These data indicate a predominantly positive effect of the course on the life orientation of most students. A comparison of the average and maximum indicators showed that after completing the course, not only the average values increased, but also the gap between the average and marginal results narrowed, which indicates an equalisation of the levels of life meaningfulness in the group and the establishment of more stable value orientations. In general, the results indicate an increase in internal motivation, awareness of life goals, and an increase in the level of responsibility for own life choices. Participants of the training course demonstrated a tendency to move from externally determined to internally motivated strategies of self-realisation, which is one of the key indicators of personal development and professional maturity of future psychologists.

According to the results of the “Level of Subjective Control” methodology, a significant increase in internality was recorded by an average of 29.5%, which indicates the establishment of greater internal responsibility for own life and professional activities. The most pronounced positive changes were observed on the “achievement” and “interpersonal relationships” scales ($p < 0.05$), where participants were more likely to attribute successes and failures to their own efforts rather than external circumstances or chance. This indicates the strengthening of autonomy, responsibility, and internal position of the individual, which are important components of a mature psychological structure. The likely reason for this increase in internality is the influence of a learning environment focused on self-reflection, analysis of own experience, and the development of a conscious attitude to personal changes. Students’ participation in practical exercises of the guided imagery contributed to the development of the habit of internal analysis of motives, feelings and decisions, which gradually reduced the level of external attribution of events. In addition, the collective form of experience discussion and the supportive atmosphere of the course created conditions for safe awareness

of own strengths, which also contributed to an increased sense of control over own actions. The psychological consequences of these changes were an increase in achievement motivation, an increase in stress tolerance, and increased self-regulation. Students who demonstrated a higher level of internality simultaneously showed better results in tasks that require independence, initiative, and responsibility. This is consistent with data from previous studies, where the development of an internal locus of control was considered as a factor that positively affects academic performance, professional motivation, and emotional stability (Bolton, 1985; Bauckhage & Sell, 2021). A more detailed analysis showed that an increase in internality in the field of interpersonal relationships was accompanied by a decrease in dependence on external assessment and an increase in the ability to resolve conflicts constructively. This indicates the expansion of students’ social and communicative competencies, which is an important aspect of personal maturity. It can be stated that the development of the internal locus of control is not only an indicator of psychological autonomy, but also a powerful predictor of successful self-realisation, adaptability, and professional stability of future psychologists.

Based on the results of the Hardiness Test by S.R. Maddi (2006), average grew by 13.3% ($R < 0.01$), which indicates an overall increase in the level of psychological stability of students. The greatest progress was recorded in the “control” (+17.5%) and “challenge acceptance” scales (+15.1%). This means that study participants were more likely to view difficult life situations as an opportunity for development, rather than as a threat or stressful factor. The growth of indicators on the “control” scale demonstrates an increase in students’ confidence in the ability to influence events in their own lives, which indicates the development of internal responsibility and self-regulation. Such changes can be caused both by the influence of a developing educational environment focused on reflection, self-knowledge and personal growth, and by the participation of students in educational practices that included elements of psychotherapeutic methods, in particular guided imagery. Strengthening hardiness has a positive effect on academic performance, as it increases motivation for achievement, the ability to overcome difficulties, adapt to changes, and maintain internal balance. These results indicate the development of a more mature personal position, characterised by a conscious acceptance of responsibility for own development and a willingness to constructively overcome life’s challenges. Correlation analysis revealed a number of significant relationships between the studied indicators. In particular, the growth of the creativity index significantly correlates with the level of personal maturity ($r = 0.48$; $p < 0.05$), which confirms the interdependence of the development of creative abilities and integration of the individual. This connection can be explained by the fact that creativity implies the ability to self-reflect, flexible thinking, openness to new experiences and the ability to see alternative ways to solve problems-qualities that are

also indicators of personal maturity. Creative activity stimulates awareness of own potential, promotes autonomy and the development of an integral "Self-Concept", which is an important condition for internal development.

There was a significant association between internality (according to the LSC method) and hardiness ($r=0.52$; $p<0.01$). This suggests that an inner sense of control over the events of one's own life enhances the individual's ability to overcome difficulties, maintain emotional stability, and form active stress management strategies. The psychological mechanism of this connection is the development of responsibility, self-regulation and self-confidence. Thus, the identified correlations are of great practical importance for building programs of psychological support for students, since they emphasise the role of creative potential and internal responsibility as factors of personal growth and life adaptation. A qualitative analysis of student reflections confirmed not only the statistically recorded positive dynamics, but also revealed the internal psychological mechanisms underlying personal changes. The interpretation of the images that the participants worked with showed the activation of the processes of self – reflection, integration of emotional experience, and reconstruction of personal meanings – key components of the formation of a mature personality of a future psychologist. One participant noted: "While working with the image of the road, I saw for the first time that it led up, and this gave me a sense of confidence in my own future". Another emphasised: "Working with the flower motif helped me understand that my self has a hidden resource that I am gradually beginning to discover". These statements illustrate the deep processes of self-knowledge and meaning-making that occur within the framework of guided imagery.

The image of "Road" became a symbol of movement towards goals, professional development, and personal growth. Awareness of the "road leading up" indicates the formation of a long-term vision of life and the ability to perceive professional development as a process of constant self-improvement. This is consistent with the idea of V. E. Frankl (1962) regarding the existence of a "semantic vector" as a determining factor of psychological well-being. The motif of "Flower", which participants associated with the discovery of an internal resource, reflects an awareness of their own self-esteem and creative potential. The symbolic "opening of the flower" can be considered as a metaphor for the process of individuation according to C.G. Jung (1964), which involves the gradual integration of unconscious aspects of the individual and the achievement of internal integrity. The motif of "Mountain" actualised the archetype of support, stability, and strength. One of the students said: "The mountain turned out to be a symbol of support for me – I saw that there was something unshakable in me that I could rely on". Such experiences indicate the establishment of basic self-confidence, increased subjective control, and the development of internality. This can be interpreted as a transition from external dependence to internal support, which is a sign of psychological maturity. The

image of "Clouds" has become a symbol of emotional dynamics, variability and acceptance. One participant wrote: "When I watched the movement of clouds, I felt that I could afford to let go of past experiences", while another noted: "Clouds helped me to see the variability of emotions and accept them as a natural part of my life". These statements indicate an increase in emotional-reflexive flexibility, the development of the ability to self-regulate and accept own emotions, which corresponds to an increase in the level of emotional intelligence. The "Treasure" motif reflected the discovery of inner values and meanings. One of the students wrote: "When I found the treasure, I realised that it was not something material, but my inner light". This interpretation of the symbol demonstrates the transition from external to internal motivation, reorientation from the desire for achievements to awareness of one's own life mission. Thus, the results of qualitative analysis indicate that guided imagery motives play the role of catalysts for deep personal processes: the development of self-knowledge, self-acceptance, emotional maturity, internal consistency, and meaning-making. Working with images contributes to the harmonisation of cognitive, emotional and motivational spheres, forms the ability to reflect, internal self-control and psychological stability. All this creates favourable conditions for the formation of professional identity of the future psychologist, since it is personal maturity, autonomy, and creativity that are the key characteristics of a specialist in the helping profession.

Thus, the results of a comprehensive study convincingly confirm the effectiveness of the guided imagery course as a means of psychological development of students. Not only quantitative growth of creativity indicators is revealed, but also qualitative changes in the structure of personal functioning. In particular, there is an increase in the level of personal maturity, meaningfulness of life, internality, and hardiness, which indicates an increase in the ability of students to self-reflection, self-regulation, and conscious decision-making in life. Such results can be interpreted as evidence of the formation of a more holistic and harmonious "self" concept where cognitive, emotional and semantic components interact in a single system. The growth of creativity reflects the development of flexible thinking, the ability to symbolically comprehend experience, and search for new ways of self-expression. Increasing hardiness and internality demonstrates strengthening the internal locus of control, which is an important condition for mature, responsible behaviour. In general, the results obtained indicate that participation in the guided imagery course contributed not only to the development of creative potential, but also to deep personal transformations: the growth of psychological autonomy, emotional flexibility, and the ability to constructively overcome life challenges. Guided imagery as an academic discipline has a significant impact not only on the cognitive, but also on the personal characteristics of students. However, it is important to consider these data in the context of contemporary scientific literature, compare such studies, and determine what makes this research unique.

The study by B. Eyüp (2023) demonstrated that dramatic practices can have a positive impact on participants' self-esteem, performance, and personal confidence. In particular, it was found that regular participation in dramatic projects contributes to the growth of students' confidence in their own abilities, increasing their emotional balance and self-acceptance. These results are consistent with the data of the current study, which recorded an increase in the level of personal maturity and subjective control, which indicates an expansion of students' self-awareness and the establishment of a more responsible life position. A report by S.E. Sayar & P. Yildiz (2025) also highlighted the role of creative drama in developing flexibility and originality of thinking. It was noted that participation in creative dramatic exercises stimulates non-standard thinking, increases tolerance to uncertainty, and promotes the development of metacognitive skills. Although a different methodology is used – in particular, role-playing and improvisation exercises – the results show a similar trend: students who participated in creative dramatic activities had statistically higher scores in terms of flexibility and originality. These conclusions reinforce the rationale for the results of the study, which recorded a positive dynamic of TTCT indicators. O.O. Iliuk (2021) investigated the influence of creative drama on the development of pedagogical identity and creative thinking of future teachers. The results showed that drama classes help students to develop the tools of a creative approach to learning, form the ability to reflect and promote professional self-determination. Compared to the results obtained in the study, the influence of dramatic techniques on the development of creativity, self-understanding and hardiness is similar, although the methods of implementation vary. If here the main emphasis was placed on pedagogical activity, then the guided imagery used in the study was primarily aimed at deep self-reflection and integration of internal experience. J.L. Smith & J.D. Herring (1993) has shown that including dramatic elements in the learning process improves students' social and emotional development, especially in aspects of empathy, emotional regulation, and social interaction. This conclusion is fully consistent with the results of the study, where there was an increase in emotional competence, in particular, due to changes in life-meaning orientations and subjective control. However, the guided imagery, unlike the conventional psychological techniques, focuses not only on interpersonal interactions, but also on internal symbolism and working with the image. This approach provides a deeper psychological transformation, since the image becomes a channel for understanding unconscious processes, emotions and internal conflicts.

Research by M.-P. Celume *et al.* (2020) showed that dramatic pedagogy promotes the development of Theory of Mind and cooperative behaviour in children. Although the context of this study was different – a different age category and pedagogical goal – the conclusions about the positive impact of dramatic methods on the development of emotional competence are consistent with the results of

the study. Guided imagery, as a form of dramatic approach, expands this effect by involving the symbolic level – that is, the ability to work not only with external manifestations of emotions, but also with their internal content. The study also revealed a number of aspects that are not always considered in other papers. In particular, correlations were established between indicators of creativity, personal maturity, subjective control, and hardiness. This allows speaking about the systemic nature of the influence of guided imagery, which combines cognitive, emotional and semantic aspects of personal development. Such integration effects are rarely described in creative drama studies, which often focus only on the development of individual components, such as creativity or communication skills. For example, in the paper by J. Rae (2022), dedicated to the development of creativity in higher education, offers a model where the development of creativity depends on interaction, liminal space, and leadership. While this approach emphasises the importance of social context and partnerships, it does not cover the deep symbolic dimension that is central to the guided imagery. It is working with the image in the inner space of the individual that allows integrating experiences, forming new meanings, and expanding internal freedom – both cognitive and emotional. Separately, it should be noted that the effectiveness of guided imagery is also confirmed by the results of contemporary empirical studies in related fields. In particular, the study by H.H. Tok & M.T. Kesgin (2024) on the impact of creative drama training on nursing students has proven that this form of training increases mental health, self-knowledge, and empathy compared to conventional methods. These results confirm the expediency of using dramatic methods for personal development of students, although the approach of guided imagery is characterised by a greater depth of psychological study of experience.

Thus, the study not only confirmed the trends described in the international literature, but also expanded them, offering a new perspective on understanding the educational potential of guided imagery. Its effectiveness consists in combining three levels of influence: cognitive (development of creativity, thinking, ability to comprehend), emotional (increasing empathy, emotional flexibility, self-acceptance) and semantic (deepening self-reflection, forming value orientations). It is this integration that allows speaking of the guided imagery as a universal tool for developing personal maturity. It is important to emphasise that the use of guided imagery in the educational process has not only pedagogical, but also psychotherapeutic significance. Students develop the ability to introspect, internal dialogue, awareness of their own emotional states and life scenarios. This creates conditions for the development of emotional regulation, increases tolerance to stress and promotes the development of internal integrity (Ishchuk, 2023). Given the current challenges – social uncertainty, high levels of anxiety and professional burnout among young people – such results are of practical value. The conducted research demonstrates the potential of guided imagery as an educational tool that combines elements

of psychotherapy, creative self-expression, and the development of personal competencies. The introduction of guided imagery in the higher education system can contribute to a more holistic development of future specialists – not only as professionals, but also as mature, self-reflective, emotionally stable individuals. Guided imagery can become not just a part of a course on creative drama, but a separate educational module that combines psychotherapeutic, pedagogical, and personal development elements. Further studies involving different samples, cultural contexts, and a long follow-up period are needed to confirm the effectiveness and scalability of such interventions. Promising areas of further research can be the analysis of the dynamics of changes in students' professional self-determination, the study of the influence of guided imagery on the development of emotional intelligence, and the long-term effects of personal growth.

CONCLUSIONS

The conducted research confirmed the effectiveness of guided imagery as an innovative educational technology that contributes to the development of personal maturity and creative thinking of students of psychological specialties. The results obtained show positive dynamics in all key indicators, which indicates a harmonious combination of emotional, cognitive, and motivational components of personal development. After completing the course, there was a statistically significant increase in the indicators of originality, flexibility and overall creativity index (by 15-30%). This indicates an activation of divergent thinking, an expansion of the cognitive repertoire, and an increase in students' ability to generate new ideas and find non-standard solutions. According to the method of studying the level of personal maturity, an increase in reflexivity and value awareness has been established, which indicates the development of self-regulation, integration of the motivational and semantic sphere, and the ability to make responsible life choices.

Also significant is the growth of indicators using the "life-meaning orientations" method, which indicates a deeper awareness of own life goals, an increase in internal motivation, and readiness for self-realisation. By working with mental images, the guided imagery contributes to the actualisation of existential meanings and the development

of a holistic vision of life. The increase in the level of internality (by 29.5%) indicates the strengthening of the internal position of students, their ability to take responsibility for their own actions and overcome dependence on external circumstances, which is an important indicator of personal autonomy and psychological maturity of future specialists. An additional confirmation of the effectiveness of the method was the increase in hardiness indicators according to the test by C. Maddi (by 13.3%). This demonstrates the development of adaptive coping strategies and the ability to perceive difficulties as an opportunity for personal growth. The most noticeable changes were found in the "control" and "challenge acceptance" components, which indicates an increase in the active life position of students.

Correlation analysis showed positive interdependencies between creativity and personal maturity ($r = 0.48$; $p < 0.05$), and between internality and hardiness ($r = 0.52$; $p < 0.01$). This confirms the mutual reinforcement of cognitive, emotional and semantic aspects of personal development in the conditions of using guided imagery. The use of guided imagery in the educational process creates a safe space for self-knowledge, empathy development, reflection and integration of emotional experience. It has proven its effectiveness not only as a psychotherapeutic method, but also as an effective didactic tool in the training of future psychologists. Thus, the guided imagery acts as an effective means of developing personal maturity, creativity, and emotional competence of students. Its integration into the curricula of psychological specialties can become a promising area for the modernisation of professional education focused on the holistic development of the individual. Further research should be aimed at determining the long-term effects of using guided imagery and analysing its impact on other components of professional competence.

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Символдрама як навчальна дисципліна: освітні технології у формуванні особистісної зрілості та творчого мислення студентів

Анотація. Актуальність дослідження зумовлена зростаючим інтересом педагогіки та психології до використання символдрами як освітньої технології, здатної сприяти розвитку особистісної зрілості та творчого мислення студентів. У контексті підготовки майбутніх психологів особливого значення набуває пошук інноваційних підходів до формування їх креативності та емоційної компетентності. Метою статті було виявити вплив символдрами як навчальної дисципліни на розвиток особистісної зрілості та творчого мислення студентів психологічних спеціальностей. Методологічною основою стало застосування методу символдрами (кататимно-імагінативної психотерапії), що передбачало роботу з керованими уявними образами та подальшою рефлексією. У дослідженні взяли участь 30 студентів спеціальності «Психологія» Київського університету інтелектуальної власності та права, які протягом семестру проходили курс із використанням базових мотивів («Будинок», «Квітка», «Хмари», «Скарб», «Скеля», «Дорога»). Для оцінки динаміки особистісних характеристик застосовано комплекс психодіагностичних методик: тест креативного мислення Торренса, методику визначення рівня особистісної зрілості, смисложиттєві орієнтації, тест суб'єктивного контролю та тест життєстійкості. Встановлено, що після проходження курсу символдрами у студентів статистично значуще зросли показники оригінальності й гнучкості мислення, рівня рефлексії, відповідальності, усвідомленості життєвих цілей та інтернальності. Проаналізовано зміни у розвитку емоційної компетентності та психологічної стійкості, що підтверджує ефективність методу у формуванні особистісної зрілості. Розроблено практичні рекомендації щодо інтеграції символдрами у навчальні плани підготовки психологів. Практична цінність дослідження полягає у можливості використання його результатів викладачами психологічних дисциплін та фахівцями освітньої сфери для підвищення якості професійної підготовки студентів

Ключові слова: терапевтична взаємодія; педагогічна інновація; креативність; особистісне зростання; рефлексія; психологічна підготовка