

PSYCHOLOGY STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF INTEGRATIVE ART THERAPY FOR DEVELOPING CREATIVE COMPETENCE: A QUALITATIVE STUDY USING SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

NURKHANOVA G.B.^{1*}, KNISSARINA M.M.²

*Nurkhanova Gulmira Bakhtiyarovna¹ – 2nd year doctoral student of educational program 8D01101-Pedagogy and psychology, M.Auezov South Kazakhstan university, Shymkent, Kazakhstan.

E-mail: gulmira_84_bk@mail.ru, <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-8353-7514>

Knissarina Malika Maksatovna² – PhD, associate professor of the department of psychology, West Kazakhstan M.Ospanov medical university, Aktobe, Kazakhstan.

E-mail: uku_malika@mail.ru, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7350-1768>

Abstract. The article examines psychology students' perceptions of the potential of integrative art therapy in developing creative competence. The purpose of the study was to identify students' views on the potential of integrative art therapy to enhance creative thinking, emotional reflection, and professional readiness. The study was conducted within a qualitative research framework using semi-structured interviews. The participants included 15 third- and fourth-year students enrolled in the Educational Program «Pedagogy and Psychology» at M. Auezov South Kazakhstan University. Data processing and interpretation were carried out using the thematic analysis approach proposed by V. Braun and V. Clarke. The thematic analysis identified the main categories reflecting students' perceptions of the nature of creative competence, the possibilities of integrative art therapy, expected personal and professional outcomes, potential barriers to the use of creative methods, and the prospects for introducing the discipline «Integrative Art Therapy». The findings indicate that psychology students hold positive perceptions regarding the potential of integrative art therapy and support the inclusion of the discipline «Integrative Art Therapy» in the professional training of future educational psychologists.

Key words: creative competence, integrative art therapy, psychology students, qualitative research, semi-structured interview, thematic analysis, professional training.

Introduction

In recent years, increasing attention has been paid in higher education to developing not only the professional knowledge and skills of future specialists, but also the competencies that ensure cognitive flexibility, the ability to seek non-standard solutions, and the creative transformation of professional experience. These qualities are of particular importance in the training of educational psychologists whose professional activity involves continuous interaction with various categories of learners, solving complex psychological and pedagogical problems, and applying an individualized approach when working with individuals.

In the research literature, creative competence is considered an integrative personal characteristic that combines creative thinking, reflective abilities, emotional responsiveness, and readiness to generate new ways of professional activity. In this regard, the search for educational technologies capable of fostering these characteristics among psychology students becomes especially relevant. One of the most promising approaches is integrative art therapy, which combines methods of visual arts, music therapy, fairy-tale therapy, psychodrama, metaphorical associative cards, and other forms of creative self-expression. The application of these methods creates favorable conditions for the development of imagination, emotional awareness, reflection, and the creative potential of an individual.

Despite the considerable number of studies devoted to creativity and art therapy, the subjective perceptions of psychology students themselves regarding the potential of integrative art therapy in the development of their creative competence remain insufficiently explored. In this regard, a qualitative study based on the analysis of students' experiences and opinions is of considerable scientific interest.

Research Aim

The purpose of the study was to identify psychology students' perceptions of the possibilities

of integrative art therapy in the development of creative competence and to determine their readiness to study the corresponding educational module.

Scientific Novelty of the Study

The scientific novelty of the study lies in identifying psychology students' subjective perceptions of the potential of integrative art therapy in the development of creative competence through the qualitative analysis of semi-structured interview data. Unlike the majority of previous studies, which mainly focus on the quantitative evaluation of the effectiveness of individual art therapy techniques, the present research emphasizes the investigation of students' personal experiences and perceptions.

In recent years, the issue of developing the creative competence of future specialists has occupied an important place in psychological and pedagogical research. This trend is associated with transformations occurring in the educational environment, which require university graduates not only to possess a high level of professional training but also to demonstrate flexible thinking, independent problem-solving abilities, and the capacity for the creative transformation of professional experience.

From the perspective of the competence-based approach, professional training should be aimed not only at the acquisition of knowledge but also at the formation of creative experience and the ability to apply it in various professional situations [1].

The theoretical foundations of creativity research have been extensively developed in the works of M.Csikszentmihalyi, T.Amabile, H.Gardner, and other scholars [2; 3; 4]. According to Csikszentmihalyi, creativity is viewed as a complex process arising from the interaction between the individual, the social environment, and professional activity [3]. The author emphasizes that the development of creative potential is impossible outside a specific sociocultural context. T. Amabile considers creativity to be the result of the interaction among domain-relevant skills, creative thinking abilities, and intrinsic motivation [2].

Contemporary approaches to creativity are reflected in the Four C Model proposed by J.C.Kaufman and R.A.Beghetto. According to this model, creativity is regarded as a multidimensional phenomenon manifested in everyday, professional, and eminent creative activity [5].

In Russian and Kazakh psychology, the problem of personal creative potential development is considered within the context of future specialists' professional formation. Significant contributions to understanding the psychological mechanisms of personality development have been made by K.B. Zharykbayev and S.M. Dzhakupov [6; 7], whose works emphasize the importance of learners' active subject position in the process of professional training.

According to I.A. Zimnyaya, competencies represent an integrative outcome of education encompassing knowledge, skills, personal qualities, and readiness for professional activity [8].

Integrative art therapy is of particular interest in the context of developing creative competence. Contemporary studies demonstrate that artistic and creative methods contribute to the development of imagination, reflection, emotional stability, and self-expression. According to C.A.Malchiodi [9; 10], art therapy methods create a safe environment for exploring personal experiences and unlocking an individual's creative potential. S.McNiff [11] shares a similar perspective, considering creative activity as a means of personal growth and professional development.

Despite the substantial body of existing research, most studies have focused primarily on examining the effectiveness of individual art therapy techniques or on quantitatively evaluating their outcomes. Considerably little attention has been given to investigating students' subjective perceptions of the potential of integrative art therapy in the development of creative competence. This aspect is of particular interest, as it makes it possible to explore the issue through the lens of the personal experiences of future educational psychologists.

As noted by Rubin [12], various approaches to art therapy enable the use of artistic expression as a means of self-expression and personal development, while also facilitating a deeper understanding of individuals' emotional experiences.

The present study focuses on exploring psychology students' perceptions of the potential of integrative art therapy in fostering creative competence. To achieve this objective, a qualitative research design was employed, based on semi-structured interviews followed by thematic analysis of the collected data. The thematic analysis approach proposed by Braun and Clarke [13] makes it possible to identify recurring patterns of meaning and to gain a more profound understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

Materials and methods of research

The present study was conducted within the framework of investigating the potential of integrative art therapy in developing the creative competence of future educational psychologists. The methodological foundation of the research was a qualitative approach, which allows for the exploration of participants' subjective perceptions and experiences concerning the phenomenon under investigation [14].

The empirical base of the study was M.Auezov South Kazakhstan University. The sample consisted of 15 third- and fourth-year students enrolled in the Educational Program "Pedagogy and Psychology".

Semi-structured interviews were conducted using five open-ended questions aimed at identifying students' perceptions regarding the essence of creative competence, the role of integrative art therapy in professional training, expected personal and professional outcomes, potential barriers to creative self-expression, and prospects for applying art therapy methods in future professional activities.

Data processing and interpretation were carried out using thematic analysis proposed by V.Braun and V.Clarke [13]. This approach involved several stages, including familiarization with the interview transcripts, coding of meaningful fragments, identification and refinement of thematic categories, and interpretation of the obtained findings. The application of thematic analysis enabled the identification of stable semantic patterns reflecting psychology students' perceptions of the potential of integrative art therapy in developing creative competence.

To explore psychology students' perceptions of the potential of integrative art therapy in developing creative competence, semi-structured interviews consisting of five open-ended questions were conducted. The content and analytical focus of the interview questions are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Questions Used in the Semi-Structured Interview

No	Questions	Analytical Focus
1	How do you understand the concept of creative competence in a future educational psychologist, and what qualities characterize a creative specialist?	- Perceptions of creative competence; - Professionally significant qualities.
2	In your opinion, what role can integrative art therapy methods play in the training of future educational psychologists?	- Students' attitudes toward integrative art therapy; - Awareness of its professional value.
3	What personal and professional qualities, in your opinion, can be developed through studying and applying integrative art therapy methods?	- Expected outcomes; - Perceived opportunities for developing creative competence.
4	What difficulties or limitations may arise when applying art therapy methods in the educational process?	- Potential barriers; - Organizational and psychological difficulties.
5	Do you consider it appropriate to include the discipline «Integrative Art Therapy» in the educational program for educational psychologists? Why?	- Educational needs of students; - Readiness to study a new module; - Prospects for implementation.

Thematic analysis of the interview transcripts made it possible to identify several recurring

categories reflecting students' perceptions of integrative art therapy and creative competence. The identified thematic categories and their descriptions are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Thematic Categories Identified through Interview Analysis

No.	Thematic Category	Description
1	Perceptions of Creative Competence	Students' understanding of creative competence and professionally significant qualities of educational psychologists
2	Perceptions of the Potential of Integrative Art Therapy	Students' views regarding the role of integrative art therapy in professional training
3	Expected Personal and Professional Outcomes	Perceptions of opportunities for developing creativity, reflection, and professionally important qualities
4	Potential Barriers to the Application of Creative Methods	Psychological and organizational difficulties associated with the use of art therapy methods
5	Readiness to Study the Discipline and Apply the Methods	Attitudes toward introducing the discipline «Integrative Art Therapy» and prospects for its practical implementation

Results and its discussion

Analysis of the interview data demonstrated that the majority of participants associated creative competence with the ability to find non-standard solutions, demonstrate flexibility of thinking, and approach professional activities creatively. In students' perceptions, creativity was viewed not only as an individual personality trait but also as an important professional characteristic of educational psychologists. Some respondents noted that creative specialists are capable of considering the individual characteristics of clients and applying various methods of psychological assistance.

1. Students' Perceptions of Creative Competence

Interview analysis revealed that most participants associated creative competence not only with creative self-expression but also with the ability to find unconventional solutions in professional practice.

As one respondent stated: «I think that a creative psychologist should be able to find an approach to different people. It is not always possible to use the same method of work, so one should be able to look at a situation from different perspectives» (Respondent No. 3).

Another participant emphasized: «For me, creativity means not being afraid of new ideas and being able to adapt quickly to different situations. This is important for a psychologist because every person is different» (Respondent No. 8).

These statements indicate that students perceive creative competence as a professionally significant quality associated with cognitive flexibility and the ability to search for individualized ways of interaction.

The obtained results are consistent with Csikszentmihalyi's concept, according to which creativity develops through the interaction of personality, professional activity, and the social environment [3].

Therefore, students regard creative competence as an essential component of the professional preparation of future educational psychologists.

2. Perceptions of the Potential of Integrative Art Therapy

Most respondents expressed positive views regarding the potential of integrative art therapy and associated it with the development of emotional awareness and creative potential.

One participant noted: «It seems to me that creative methods help people understand themselves better. Sometimes it is easier to express through drawings or images what is difficult to explain in words» (Respondent No. 7).

Another interviewee expressed the following opinion: «Integrative art therapy can be useful not only for clients but also for psychologists themselves. It helps develop imagination and teaches

us to view different situations from another perspective» (Respondent No. 12).

Analysis of participants' responses suggests that students perceive integrative art therapy as a means of developing creative potential and emotional awareness. These views correspond to Malchiodi's perspective, according to which artistic and creative activities represent an important resource for personal and professional development [9].

Consequently, students evaluate the possibilities of integrative art therapy positively and associate them with the expansion of professional experience.

3. Expected Personal and Professional Outcomes

When discussing the expected outcomes of applying integrative art therapy methods, respondents most frequently mentioned increased self-confidence, emotional stability, and communication skills.

One participant stated: «I think these methods help people become more open and understand their feelings better. This is very important for psychologists» (Respondent No. 11).

Another respondent emphasized: «Creative tasks develop imagination and teach us to notice things we previously paid no attention to. I think this may be useful in our future profession» (Respondent No. 4).

These statements demonstrate respondents' understanding of the relationship between creative activity and the development of professionally significant qualities. According to students, integrative art therapy contributes to the development of reflection, emotional resilience, and the ability to interact effectively with others.

Similar views are reflected in the works of S. McNiff, who considers creativity a means of personal growth and self-discovery [11].

Thus, students associate integrative art therapy with opportunities for both personal and professional development.

4. Potential Barriers to the Application of Creative Methods

Analysis of the interview data demonstrated that students were aware of certain difficulties that may arise when implementing art therapy methods in educational practice.

According to one of the respondents, «Not everyone is ready to express themselves through creativity right away. Some people may feel embarrassed or worry that they will be judged» (Respondent No. 5).

Another participant noted: «I think that using such methods requires specific knowledge. If a specialist is not sufficiently trained, difficulties may arise» (Respondent No. 9).

These statements indicate students' awareness of psychological and organizational factors influencing the effectiveness of creative methods. Respondents emphasized the importance of creating a psychologically safe environment and possessing specialized professional training.

Thus, the implementation of integrative art therapy requires appropriate knowledge, competencies, and methodological preparation on the part of specialists.

5. Readiness to Study the Discipline and Apply the Methods

The majority of participants positively evaluated the possibility of introducing the discipline «Integrative Art Therapy» into the educational curriculum for future educational psychologists.

One student remarked: «I would be interested in studying such a discipline. I believe this knowledge would be useful when working with children and adolescents» (Respondent No. 14).

Another respondent expressed the following opinion: «Integrative art therapy can broaden the psychologist's opportunities. The more methods a specialist knows, the easier it is to find an approach to a person» (Respondent No. 2).

The obtained findings indicate students' interest in studying integrative art therapy and their positive attitude toward its integration into the educational process. Respondents considered this field to be a promising component of professional training.

Therefore, the findings indicate a clear educational need for the development and implementation of the course «Integrative Art Therapy» within the system of training future educational psychologists.

Distribution of Thematic Categories Identified through Thematic Analysis (Figure 1)

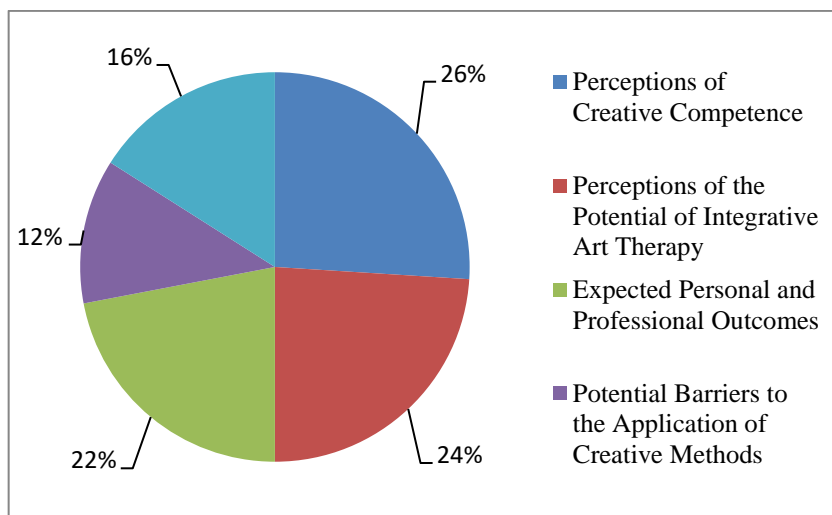


Figure 1. Distribution of thematic categories identified through the analysis of psychology students' responses

The thematic analysis resulted in the identification of 68 meaning units. The largest proportion of codes was associated with students' perceptions of the essence of creative competence (26%), perceptions of the potential of integrative art therapy (24%), and expected personal and professional outcomes (22%). Less frequently encountered were statements reflecting readiness to study the discipline «Integrative Art Therapy» (16%) and potential barriers to the application of creative methods (12%).

As a result of the thematic analysis, five major categories were identified, reflecting respondents' perceptions concerning:

- the essence of creative competence;
- the possibilities of integrative art therapy;
- expected personal and professional outcomes;
- potential difficulties associated with the application of creative methods;
- readiness to study the discipline «Integrative Art Therapy» and apply its methods in future professional practice.

Based on the thematic analysis, a conceptual scheme illustrating the relationships among the major categories reflecting psychology students' perceptions of the role of integrative art therapy in developing creative competence was constructed (Figure 2).

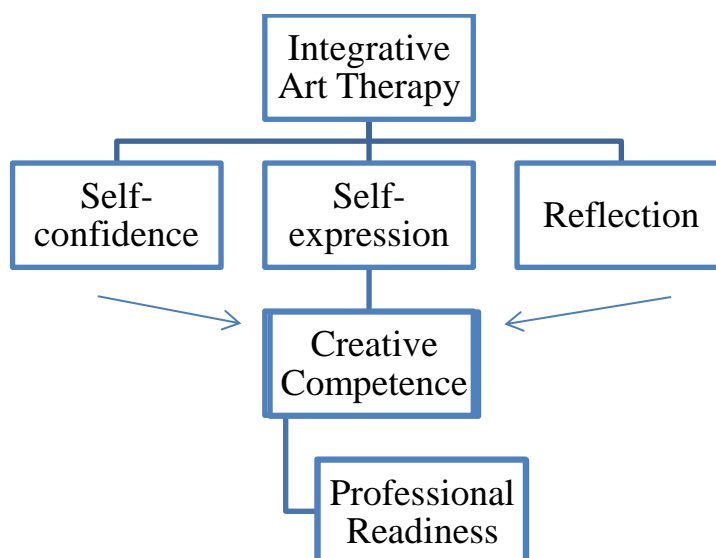


Figure 2. Relationships among the Major Categories Identified during the Interview Analysis

The obtained findings indicate that, according to respondents, the use of integrative art therapy methods contributes to the development of self-expression, reflection, and self-confidence, which students perceive as important components of creative competence. The development of these qualities, in turn, contributes to enhancing the professional readiness of future educational psychologists.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of the study are associated with the relatively small sample size and the use of a qualitative research approach, which does not allow statistical generalization of the findings. Nevertheless, the findings provide a deeper understanding of students' subjective perceptions regarding the potential of integrative art therapy and may serve as a foundation for subsequent quantitative studies.

Conclusion

The present study explored the specific features of psychology students' perceptions of the potential of integrative art therapy in developing creative competence. The results indicate that future specialists associate creative competence with cognitive flexibility, the ability to find unconventional solutions, professional mobility, and readiness for creative interaction. It was found that students perceive integrative art therapy as an effective means of developing imagination, emotional resilience, reflection, and self-expression skills. According to respondents' perceptions, the use of art therapy methods contributes to creating a favorable psychological environment and expanding opportunities for professional self-realization. The study also identified several factors hindering the manifestation of creative activity. Among the most frequently mentioned factors were lack of self-confidence, fear of negative evaluation, and insufficient experience in creative activities. At the same time, students emphasized that a supportive educational environment facilitates overcoming these barriers.

The findings allow us to conclude that psychology students positively perceive the possibilities of integrative art therapy and support its integration into the professional training of future educational psychologists. The practical significance of the study lies in the possibility of using the obtained results in the development of elective courses, training programs, and psychological and pedagogical disciplines aimed at fostering students' creative competence.

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ПСИХОЛОГ-СТУДЕНТТЕРІНІҢ КРЕАТИВТІ ҚҰЗЫРЕТТІЛІГІН ҚАЛЫПТАСТЫРУДАҒЫ ИНТЕГРАТИВТІ АРТ-ТЕРАПИЯНЫҢ МҮМКІНДІКТЕРІН ҚАБЫЛДАУЫ: ЖАРТЫЛАЙ ҚҰРЫЛЫМДАНҒАН СҰХБАТҚА НЕГІЗДЕЛГЕН САПАЛЫҚ ЗЕРТТЕУ

НУРХАНОВА Г.Б.^{1*} , КНИСАРИНА М.М.² 

*Нурханова Гульмира Бахтияровна¹ – 8D01101-Педагогика және психология блім бағдарламасының 2-курс докторанты, М.Әуезов атындағы Оңтүстік Қазақстан университеті, Шымкент қ., Қазақстан.

Е-mail: gulmira_84_bk@mail.ru, <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-8353-7514>

Книсарина Малика Максатовна² – Философия докторы (PhD), психология кафедрасының қауымдастырылған профессоры, М.Оспанов атындағы Батыс Қазақстан медицина университеті, Ақтөбе қ., Қазақстан.

E-mail: uku_malika@mail.ru, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7350-1768>

Аңдатпа. Мақалада психолог-студенттердің креативті құзыреттілігін қалыптастырудағы интегративті арт-терапия мүмкіндіктерін қабылдау ерекшеліктері қарастырылады. Зерттеудің мақсаты – білім алушылардың интегративті арт-терапияның шығармашылық ойлауды, эмоционалдық рефлексияны және кәсіби даярлықты дамытудағы мүмкіндіктері туралы көзқарастарын анықтау. Зерттеу сапалық тәсіл аясында жартылай құрылымданған сұхбат әдісін қолдану арқылы жүргізілді. Зерттеуге М. Әуезов атындағы Оңтүстік Қазақстан университетінің «Педагогика және психология» білім беру бағдарламасының 3–4 курсына оқитын 15 студент қатысты. Алынған мәліметтерді өңдеу мен интерпретациялау В. Браун мен В. Кларк ұсынған тақырыптық талдау әдісі арқылы жүзеге асырылды. Тақырыптық талдау нәтижесінде студенттердің креативті құзыреттіліктің мәні, интегративті арт-терапияның мүмкіндіктері, күтілетін тұлғалық және кәсіби әсерлері, шығармашылық әдістерді қолданудағы ықтимал кедергілер, сондай-ақ «Интегративті арт-терапия» пәнін енгізу перспективалары туралы түсініктерін сипаттайтын негізгі санаттар айқындалды. Алынған нәтижелер психолог-студенттердің интегративті арт-терапия әлеуетін оң бағалайтынын және «интегративті арт-терапия» пәнін болашақ педагог-психологтардың кәсіби дайындығына қосуды қолдайтынын көрсетеді.

Түйін сөздер: креативті құзыреттілік, интегративті арт-терапия, психолог-студенттер, сапалық зерттеу, жартылай құрылымданған сұхбат, тақырыптық талдау, кәсіби даярлық.

ВОСПРИЯТИЕ СТУДЕНТАМИ-ПСИХОЛОГАМИ ВОЗМОЖНОСТЕЙ ИНТЕГРАТИВНОЙ АРТ-ТЕРАПИИ В ФОРМИРОВАНИИ КРЕАТИВНОЙ КОМПЕТЕНТНОСТИ: КАЧЕСТВЕННОЕ ИССЛЕДОВАНИЕ МЕТОДОМ ПОЛУСТРУКТУРИРОВАННОГО ИНТЕРВЬЮ

НУРХАНОВА Г.Б.^{1*}, КНИСАРИНА М.М.²

*Нурханова Гульмира Бахтияровна¹ – Докторант 2-курса образовательной программы 8D01101-Педагогика и психология, Южно-Казахстанский университет им. М.Ауэзова, г. Шымкент, Қазақстан.

E-mail: gulmira_84_bk@mail.ru, <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-8353-7514>

Книсарина Малика Максатовна² – Доктор философии (PhD), ассоциированный профессор кафедры психологии, Западно-Казахстанский медицинский университет имени М.Оспанова, г. Ақтобе, Қазақстан.

E-mail: uku_malika@mail.ru, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7350-1768>

Аннотация. В статье рассматриваются представления студентов-психологов о возможностях интегративной арт-терапии в формировании креативной компетентности. Цель исследования заключалась в выявлении отношения обучающихся к потенциалу интегративной арт-терапии и определении их готовности к освоению соответствующей дисциплины. Исследование было выполнено в рамках качественного подхода с использованием полуструктурированного интервью. В исследовании приняли участие 15 студентов 3–4 курсов образовательной программы «Педагогика и психология» Южно-Казахстанского университета имени М. Ауэзова. Обработка и интерпретация полученных данных осуществлялись посредством тематического анализа. По результатам тематического анализа были выделены основные категории, отражающие представления студентов о сущности креативной компетентности, возможностях интегративной арт-терапии, ожидаемых личностных и профессиональных эффектах, возможных барьерах применения творческих методов и перспективах внедрения дисциплины «Интегративная арт-терапия». Полученные результаты свидетельствуют о том, что студенты-психологи положительно оценивают потенциал интегративной арт-терапии и поддерживают включение дисциплины «Интегративная арт-терапия» в профессиональную подготовку будущих педагогов-психологов.

Ключевые слова: креативная компетентность, интегративная арт-терапия, студенты-психологи, профессиональная подготовка, полуструктурированное интервью, тематический анализ, качественное исследование.