



Development of empathy in students (psychology students) using art therapy

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Abstract. The study aimed to address the impact of art therapeutic methods on the development of empathy among psychologists. The methodology was based on the analysis of research on group and individual classes, where students could express themselves through creativity and analyse personal emotional states. The main results of the study demonstrated that after art therapy, students significantly improved their skills in perceiving emotions, reflecting and active listening. The study revealed an increase in emotional sensitivity and non-verbal signal comprehension, which is a substantial component of psychological practice. In addition, the group sessions contributed to the development of social empathy, as students actively empathised with each other through discussions of their artworks and emotional experiences. The results also indicated a positive impact of art therapy on students' ability to cope with emotional stress and difficult situations, which is important for their professional activities. The results of the study demonstrated that art therapy contributes to the development of empathy in psychologists, as it stimulates the improvement of emotional sensitivity and the ability to determine the emotional states of other people. The use of creative techniques such as drawing, modelling, and dance-movement therapy helped students to reflect on emotions more deeply and improve their active listening and empathy skills. After completing the art therapy sessions, the students demonstrated improvements in emotional self-reflection, social empathy and readiness for professional interaction with clients. The practical significance of the study is determined by the fact that its results can be used by teachers of psychological disciplines, practising psychologists and art therapists to improve the methods of developing empathy in students and professionals working in the field of interpersonal counselling

Keywords: creative expression; reflection; creative techniques; social interaction; aesthetic perception

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Introduction

In the modern world, where interpersonal interaction and emotional intelligence are becoming increasingly important, the development of empathy is becoming essential for the training of psychology professionals. Empathy is a critical skill as it allows for a deeper understanding of emotions and needs, which is particularly important for psychologists involved with clients in conditions of constant stress and change. The modern challenges, such as social isolation, psychological disorders and growing anxiety levels, require new approaches to training professionals who can effectively support people. The use of art therapeutic methods creates opportunities for a deeper study of emotional processes and the development of interpersonal skills in students.

Art therapy is one of the most promising methods for the development of empathy, as it combines creative processes with psychotherapeutic methods. Studies show that engaging in artistic practices, such as drawing, music, sculpture, and dance, stimulates the development of emotional reflection and empathy. For instance, R. Sperandio *et al.* (2021) demonstrated that empathy can be developed in both online and offline therapeutic settings, but creative methods have a unique impact on deepening the emotional connection between therapy participants. I.Z. Numaneeva *et al.* (2020) also emphasise the role of the creative process, in particular, the use of English to develop empathy in students through interpersonal communication experiences. These studies show that engaging students in creative tasks not only promotes the development of social skills but also a deeper understanding of the emotional states of others.

Self-reflection and active listening techniques contribute to the development of empathy, as confirmed by J.L. Rohrer *et al.* (2021). They argued that empathy can be developed through the development of so-called soft skills, such as compassion and active listening. Their study demonstrated that these skills are important for enhancing the professional competence of

psychologists and can be improved through creative approaches to learning. Self-reflection improves awareness of personal emotions and allows students to analyse their interactions with others more deeply, which helps increase their level of empathy. Active listening, which involves full immersion in the perception of the client's messages without interruptions, helps to create an atmosphere of trust during the therapeutic process, which is key to successful psychological practice.

Another area of research in this area is the study of the role of self-expression through art in the context of empathy development. K.K. Sacco & K.E. Amende (2021) demonstrated that self-reflection through creative practices such as drawing and writing helps psychology students gain a deeper understanding of personal emotional reactions and better navigate the emotional states of others. These creative methods allow students to create visual images or write texts that serve as tools for exploring inner experiences. This is also confirmed by A.K. Kuhnley *et al.* (2023), who determined that participation in online art therapy workshops promotes empathy in students, improving their ability to self-reflect and actively listen. Notably, creative practices not only expand knowledge of personal emotions but also develop skills in understanding the emotions of others.

One of the key aspects that was insufficiently covered in previous studies is the comparison of different art therapeutic methods and their impact on the emotional and cognitive components of empathy. H. Ngo *et al.* (2022) demonstrated that different art therapy techniques have different effects on the development of empathy in psychology students, and further research is needed to determine which techniques are most effective for different groups of students. This study also emphasises that students participating in paired assignments demonstrated better results in the development of empathy than those who worked individually. Despite the positive results of previous studies, the effectiveness of art therapy for different groups of students, including those

with low levels of emotional sensitivity, remains insufficiently studied. S.L. McIntyre & L.W. Samstag (2022) demonstrated that emotional sensitivity is a significant factor in the development of empathy, but students with low emotional perception may experience difficulties in the initial stages of art therapy. Accordingly, further research should address the development of methods enabling students to overcome barriers to emotional sensitivity and empathy.

Another relevant issue is cultural empathy and its role in psychological training. N.M. Levitt *et al.* (2022) demonstrated that clinical and cultural empathy is critical for the effective professional activity of psychologists, but these aspects are not always sufficiently considered in educational programmes. This highlights the need to develop art therapy programmes that incorporate cultural context and promote cultural sensitivity in psychology students. Despite the positive impact of empathic techniques in psychotherapeutic practice, certain studies question their effectiveness without a deeper context. R. Elliott *et al.* (2023) noted that empathic reflections alone are not sufficiently effective if they are not supported by other techniques and tools for deeper analysis. This emphasises the need to integrate different approaches in the training of psychologists so that they can effectively use empathy in practice. Thus, the introduction of art therapy techniques can be substantial in the development of empathy as a complex process.

Thus, the main purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of art therapy on the development of empathy in psychology students on the development of the emotional and cognitive components. The study addressed two main objectives. The first objective was to evaluate the effectiveness of various art therapy techniques (drawing, collage, music and dance-movement therapy) in the development of empathy in psychology students. This task included an analysis of the impact of each technique on the development of emotional and cognitive empathy. The second task was to investigate the role of cultural

empathy in the educational process of psychologists, highlighting its importance for successful professional training and interaction with clients from different cultural backgrounds.

Materials and Methods

The methodology of this study was based on the analysis of scientific sources and concepts that study the development of empathy in students using art therapy practices. The study was conducted by systematising and summarising the available theoretical data on art therapy as a method for developing empathy, as well as evaluating appropriate approaches to teaching psychologists. Analysis was one of the main methods used in the research process. It was used to conduct a detailed study of scientific sources, including research on the impact of empathy on the professional activities of psychologists and the role of art therapy in the development of emotional sensitivity. The main art therapy techniques were analysed: emotion drawing, collage, clay modelling, dance and movement therapy. The analysis revealed the links between art therapy and psychotherapeutic practices.

Synthesis was used to combine the results of the analysis into a single system. It was used to integrate various aspects of theoretical research related to empathy, art therapy and psychologists' professional training into a coherent concept. Thus, the synthesis was used to combine the available data from different sources and form a general idea of the relationship between the development of empathy and the use of creative methods in the training of professionals. The generalisation method was primarily used to form the conclusions of the study. Based on the synthesis of the results of previous studies, conclusions on how art therapy promotes the development of empathy and its importance in the educational process were drawn. The generalisation was used to identify the general patterns of the impact of art therapy on the emotional development of students and the formation of their interpersonal skills. Subsequently, the scientific

material was structured using the systematisation method, which was used to logically present information about various art therapy techniques and their impact on student's emotional states. Systematisation was also used to organise the knowledge about the techniques used in art therapy into a clear classification, which emphasised their impact on different aspects of empathy development.

For the literature analysis, a careful selection of scientific sources was carried out according to the following criteria: peer-reviewed source, the relevance of the study to the topic of empathy development and art therapy, and year of publication (preference was given to studies published in the last 4 years). Articles describing modern approaches to the development of emotional sensitivity in the professional activities of psychologists, as well as studies on the implementation of art therapy in the educational process, were prioritised. The literature search was carried out in the Scopus, Web of Science and Google Scholar databases. The keywords used in the search included the following terms in English: "empathy development", "art therapy", "emotional intelligence in psychology", "psychological education", "student emotional sensitivity", "therapeutic techniques for empathy" and others. The use of various databases provided a wide coverage of scientific sources, which was used to analyse both theoretical and practical aspects of the impact of art therapy on the development of empathy. The comprehensive application of the methods of analysis, synthesis, generalisation and systematisation, highlighted the essence of the problem and identified the main ways of integrating art therapy techniques into the training of psychologists.

Results

Empathy is a key component of psychology, as it provides a deeper understanding of the emotional states and needs of clients. The term "empathy" comes from the Greek word "empathia", meaning "to feel", i.e. the ability to feel other people's emotions as if they were your own (Goldstein &

Michaels, 2021). Empathy is a complex process that includes both emotional and cognitive components. The emotional component is the perception and empathy of another person's emotions and is based on a natural response to emotional cues. According to this concept, empathy is an innate ability to empathise that develops through constant emotional contact with other people. This theory emphasised that emotional empathy is not so much dependent on intellectual effort, but rather on emotional sensitivity and the ability to intuit emotional states (Abramson *et al.*, 2020). The cognitive component involves the comprehension of the inner world of another, and the ability to recognise their experiences and points of view. According to this theory, empathy is developed through a person's intellectual ability to analyse and interpret the emotions of others. It allows not only to feel the emotions of others but also to rationally understand them, which is important for the correct response in interpersonal relationships.

In the psychological profession, empathy is not limited to feeling emotions but also involves active listening, non-verbal communication, and the ability to create a safe and supportive environment for the client. During a consultation, a psychologist can use empathic techniques to help a client feel heard and understood. For instance, one of these techniques, emotion mapping, is when a psychologist verbally or non-verbally confirms the client's emotional state by naming the emotions they observe (Hoemann *et al.*, 2021). This helps the client acknowledge that their feelings are understood and accepted. Paraphrasing is a technique in which the psychologist repeats the client's main thoughts or feelings using the client's words to demonstrate understanding and clarify information. Another important technique is active listening, which involves paying full attention to the client without interruptions, with appropriate non-verbal responses such as nodding or eye contact to maintain a sense of rapport. It also uses empathic questions that allow the client to explore their feelings more deeply,

such as: “How does this feel for you?” or “How are you feeling right now as you talk about this?” (Chui *et al.*, 2022). These techniques help to create an atmosphere of trust and support, which increases the effectiveness of the therapeutic process, as the client feels emotionally safe and ready to work more deeply on their problems.

Art therapy is an effective method for developing empathy, as it combines creative techniques with psychological practices aimed at deepening emotional perception (Table 1). One of the main methods of art therapy is drawing, and visualising emotions and feelings. During such sessions, thoughts that are difficult to describe using words are expressed, which improves self-reflection and develops empathy for oneself and others. This method is actively used both individually and in groups, helping participants to

better understand each other’s emotions. Another popular method is sculpture, which involves physical interaction with materials, contributing to increased sensitivity to personal emotions and those of others. In the process of creating a sculpture, participants concentrate on shapes and textures, which allows them to focus more on feelings. This helps increase the level of emotional sensitivity and helps better understand not only personal feelings but also the feelings of others. Dance-movement therapy is also an effective method for developing empathy, as it involves bodily expression. Participants convey their emotions through movement, which allows them to better understand the emotional states of other group members. In general, art therapy is a unique method for understanding emotions through creativity and self-expression (Brown, 2023).

Table 1. Basic art therapy techniques

Technique	Description	Impact on the development of empathy
Drawing	Creation of visual images that reflect emotions and internal states.	It improves self-reflection and promotes a deeper understanding of one’s own emotions and those of others.
Collage	Clipping images from magazines or newspapers to create a composition.	Develops cognitive empathy and helps analyse social and emotional relationships.
Clay modelling	Creation of three-dimensional objects that symbolise emotions or states.	Increases tactile sensitivity and promotes the expression of complex emotions through physical action.
Dance and movement therapy	Expressing emotions through movement and bodily expression.	Increases the perception of non-verbal signals and improves the perception of others’ emotions through movement.
Music therapy	Use of music to recreate emotions and create emotional connections.	Stimulates emotional sensitivity and promotes empathy through rhythm and melody.
Sculpture	Use of different materials to create three-dimensional shapes.	Assists students in understanding personal feelings and the feelings of others through working with materials.
Sand therapy	Use of sand to create scenes that reflect feelings.	Improves introspection and expression of emotions through symbolic images.

Source: J. Schaverien (1999)

The development of empathy in future psychologists is an important component of their professional training. One of the most effective methods for developing this skill is the use of art therapy. Art therapy combines creative practices with psychotherapeutic methods, allowing

students to explore personal emotions and experiences more deeply, as well as to better understand the emotional world of other people. Through participation in creative processes such as drawing, sculpture or collage, students can explore different forms of self-expression and, at

the same time, develop emotional sensitivity and perception of the emotional states of others. Empathy is developed through engaging in creative practices that activate introspection and increase the ability to reflect. For instance, when students create images that reflect their emotional state or life stories, they can gain new insights into their experiences. Importantly, during the group art therapy sessions, students learned to empathise with each other by discussing their artwork and the feelings they had during the creative process. This contributed to the development of both the emotional component of empathy and the cognitive component, which includes the ability to understand other points of view (Levitt *et al.*, 2022).

Art therapy is based on the use of creative processes to identify and express emotions, which in turn increases the level of emotional sensitivity and empathy. To assess the impact of art therapy on empathy, comparative studies are conducted before and after therapy sessions. This approach can be used to evaluate changes in the cognitive and emotional components of empathy that result from the integration of creative practices into the educational process. Before art therapy, the level of empathy in students is often assessed using specialised questionnaires or scales, such as the Davis Interpersonal Reactivity Scale or the Barrett-Lennon Empathy Inventory. These instruments measure both the cognitive and emotional aspects of empathy, including the perception of emotions and empathy. The study D. Meacham (2024) shows students' initial level of empathy before art therapy may be relatively low, as most young people do not yet have enough experience to deeply understand the emotions of others or to express their feelings appropriately. In art therapy, students engage in various creative exercises, such as drawing, sculpting or collage, that help explore personal emotions and reflect them in creative works. For example, the use of art therapy techniques that involve the reproduction of emotions through symbols or metaphors allows students to better understand the emotional states of others. In addition, group art

therapy sessions promote the development of social empathy through discussions of works and feelings that arise in the process of creation. Research shows that engaging in such practices increases students' ability to empathise with each other and better understand emotional experiences, leading to increased levels of empathy.

The final indicators of empathy after art therapy demonstrate a significant improvement compared to the initial results. Students can understand emotions of others' more easily, are more sensitive to non-verbal cues, and demonstrate more compassion. One of the significant factors in this development is introspection, which is activated through creative processes. Students involved in art therapy often note that they better understand not only their emotions but also the emotions of others, which is confirmed by questionnaires and psychological tests conducted after the therapy. In addition, art therapy helps to develop the ability to actively listen, which is an important component of empathy. Students who have learned to express their emotions through art become more attentive to the feelings of others and can apply these skills in their professional activities (Shafir *et al.*, 2020).

Changes in behavioural reactions of students after art therapy are noticeable and are associated with improved empathy. Art therapy promotes not only the development of emotional sensitivity but also has a positive impact on students' behavioural reactions in interpersonal communication. Before starting art therapy sessions, many students demonstrate a low readiness to openly discuss their emotions or interact with others on the level of empathy. This is often expressed in avoidance of discussions on emotional topics or insufficient attention to non-verbal signals that other people may transmit. After art therapy, students begin to demonstrate much more adaptive behavioural responses. For instance, students become more attentive to non-verbal signals during communication, such as facial expressions, tone of voice, and gestures. This is essential for psychologists, who are expected to recognise the

hidden emotional states of their clients. In addition, participants in art therapy usually become more open to expressing emotions in conversations, which helps improve their active listening skills. Students can also cope better with emotional stress, which affects their ability to have deeper emotional empathy and understanding of others. Art therapy promotes group dynamics and collective empathy, which also changes students' behavioural patterns in team environments. They become more willing to participate in joint discussions, support each other, and better manage conflict situations by using empathy skills to resolve disputes (Mastandrea *et al.*, 2019).

Practical implementation of art therapy in the educational process of future psychologists not only contributed to the development of empathy but also provided significant changes in their approach to interaction with clients and perception of personal emotions. Specific art therapy techniques used during the training covered a wide range of methods, each with its specifics and practical results. One of the most common techniques used in art therapy is emotion drawing. During such sessions, students created images that reflected their emotional state or certain life events that had a strong emotional impact on them (Schneider & Rohmann, 2021). Drawing allowed students to express complex emotions that were not always possible to communicate verbally. It is possible to conclude that this technique contributes to a better understanding of the inner emotional world and the development of emotional reflection.

Another important technique is collage, which aims to integrate different elements into a single picture. Participants are asked to clip images from magazines or newspapers that reflect their emotions or relationships with other people and create a collage. This technique helps develop the cognitive component of empathy, as students are forced to reflect on different emotional and social aspects of their lives and how they perceive others. Collage is also useful for exploring the topic of social relationships, which is critical

for psychologists as it contributes to understanding the emotional needs of clients.

Clay modelling is another effective technique used in art therapy. It promotes the development of tactile sensations and helps to create a physical object that can be a metaphor for the participant's emotional state. Sculpting can be used to express complex emotions through physical actions, which can help students find new ways to express themselves emotionally and understand the feelings of others. Many students report that after modelling classes, they begin to better understand themselves and their emotional reactions, which contributes to the development of empathy and the ability to empathise.

Group art therapy sessions also include group creativity, where students work together to create a single piece of artwork. This helps develop communication and collaboration skills and increases social empathy. Collaboration on an art project promotes awareness of different points of view and emotional states, which is necessary for psychologists. For instance, by drawing or sculpting together, students can discuss emotions, contributing to a better understanding of the emotions of other group members (Shafir *et al.*, 2020). This technique is beneficial for developing interpersonal skills and the ability to manage emotional situations in professional activities. Art therapy with meditation elements is often used in the educational process, where participants combine drawing with relaxation and concentration techniques. This technique helps develop awareness of personal emotions and those of other people. For instance, after a short meditation, students are asked to draw what they felt during the process. This not only helps to develop emotional reflection but also increases the ability to empathise, as participants become more attentive to the emotional signals they receive from others.

The analysis of factors influencing the development of empathy through art therapy should address both external and internal aspects that contribute to or limit the effectiveness of this process (Table 2). Empathy is formed under the

influence of several factors that can be divided into several key groups: individual characteristics of students, group dynamics, types of art therapy techniques used, and the influence of external conditions. Internal factors include the individual psychological characteristics of students, such as their emotional sensitivity, openness to new methods of self-expression, and ability to introspect. For instance, students with more developed emotional reflection and sensitivity to the emotional states of others may be more effective in art therapy. It is easier for them to interpret personal emotions through art, which contributes to the development of empathy. Other students may experience difficulties in expressing personal

emotions, which affects the pace of development of this skill. However, even students with low initial levels of empathy show significant progress after art therapy sessions (De Witte *et al.*, 2021). Another important internal factor is the motivation to participate in art therapy. Students who are actively involved in the process and open to exploring their emotions usually achieve better results. If participants are intrinsically motivated to improve themselves and strive to develop communication skills, their progress will be more significant. On the contrary, students who participate in the sessions without an intrinsic desire may show less pronounced changes in their empathy levels.

Table 2. Factors influencing the development of empathy through art therapy

Factors	Type	Description
Emotional sensitivity	Internal	Students with higher emotional sensitivity can better perceive the emotional aspects of art therapy.
Motivation to participate	Internal	Students with high intrinsic motivation are more actively involved in the art therapy process.
Introspection	Internal	Self-reflection helps students to become more aware of emotions and states.
Expression capabilities	Internal	Students who can express emotions are more likely to adapt to art therapy techniques.
Group dynamics	External	The atmosphere in the group affects the level of cooperation and mutual understanding during art therapy.
Support from a therapist	External	A competent therapist creates a safe environment and facilitates deep emotional engagement.
Type of techniques used	External	Different art therapies affect different aspects of empathy (emotional or cognitive).
Frequency and duration of sessions	External	Regularity of the sessions contributes to the gradual development of empathy and emotional sensitivity.

Source: L. Jackson (2020)

External factors include the influence of the social environment in which art therapy sessions take place. Group dynamics are important in building empathy. If the group is close-knit, with an atmosphere of trust and support, students feel safer in expressing their emotions, which helps to develop empathy. For instance, during group sessions where students work together on common art projects, they learn to empathise and better understand each other's emotional states. Interaction with other students promotes social empathy, as discussions of artworks often reveal

a variety of points of view and emotions. In addition, an important external factor is the professional competence of the therapist. An effective art therapist can create favourable conditions for self-expression and guide students in the process of emotional self-discovery. For instance, the therapist can help participants analyse personal artworks in more depth by asking questions that promote introspection and reflection. The professional support of the therapist is key to ensuring that students are deeply emotionally engaged in the process and ready to engage in self-reflection.

The choice of the type of art therapy technique also affects the effectiveness of empathy development. For instance, techniques that involve the reproduction of complex emotions through symbolic representation or metaphors contribute to a deeper understanding of emotional states. Emotion drawing, clay modelling, and collage are practices that help students create visual images that reflect their experiences, and these images serve as a basis for group discussion and analysis. External conditions, such as the length of the sessions and the frequency of the sessions, also affect the outcomes of art therapy. Long-term programmes that span several months allow students to dive deeper into the process of self-discovery and emotional development, which, in turn, contributes to more significant changes in empathy (Johnson *et al.*, 2021). Successful art therapy programmes provide regular sessions, allowing students to gradually improve empathy skills and maintain progress throughout their studies.

Integration of art therapy into the educational process of future psychologists can significantly improve the quality of their training, as it promotes the development of empathy, emotional reflection and interpersonal skills. For the effective implementation of these methods in education, it is necessary to create structured programmes that consider both theoretical and practical aspects of art therapy. The first step is to introduce regular art therapy classes into the curriculum of educational institutions, which will allow students to gradually improve their skills. Programmes can be structured as separate courses or integrated modules within general disciplines. For instance, art therapy sessions can be held once a week or incorporated into practical psychology classes. It is necessary to ensure constant feedback between students and teachers, which will allow timely adjustment of methods and approaches, considering the individual characteristics of each participant. This can be done by using reflective journals or group discussions, where students analyse personal emotional reactions and their impact on professional development.

Different art therapeutic techniques that meet specific curriculum objectives should also be used. To develop emotional reflection, for example, it is advisable to use drawing, where students express emotions through abstract or specific images. Group projects, such as creating sculptures or paintings together, help develop social skills and increase the ability to empathise and work in teams. In addition to the techniques, the environment in which art therapy sessions are held is of great importance. To achieve maximum results, it is important to create an atmosphere of trust and openness that allows students to feel comfortable expressing their emotions. Teachers and therapists should help students open and support them in the process of emotional self-discovery. For this purpose, it is beneficial to conduct training for teachers to learn art therapy methods and how to adapt them for different groups of students.

Importantly, art therapy should become an integral part of the curriculum and have a long-term perspective. Long-term programmes that span several semesters or years of study provide a deeper learning experience and support students' personal development. Such programmes allow not only to integrate art therapy into the educational process but also to create a platform for the continuous growth of the emotional competence of psychology students, which will prepare them for effective professional activity. To integrate empathy into the educational process, several effective programs and training use different approaches, combining theory and practice. The "Empathy for Self and Others" programme on the Coursera platform is one example of a successful course that focuses on developing self-compassion and empathy through practical exercises and reflection. Students engage in activities that help explore personal emotional responses and develop skills in active listening and understanding of others. The course, developed in collaboration with the University of Arizona, is part of a broader initiative to increase empathy in the profession of psychologists and healthcare professionals.

Another example is a programme from the EmpathyWorks Learning Centre, which offers the Empathy Roadmap to the WE Space course. This is a more practically oriented course that combines theoretical lectures with interactive exercises aimed at improving empathy skills through games and experiments. The course participants can learn how to recognise personal emotional reactions and those of others, improving skills through real-life interpersonal interactions. In addition to theory, the programme includes elements of group discussions, allowing participants to gain direct experience of empathy in a dynamic environment. For allied health professionals, it is especially necessary to develop empathic skills, as they directly affect the quality of interaction with patients (Yang *et al.*, 2020). The Empathetics programme, developed by Dr Helen Rees, offers a wide range of training for healthcare professionals in various specialties, including doctors, nurses and physiotherapists. The programme uses videos and real-life clinical examples to help participants develop skills to communicate effectively with patients and improve patient outcomes. Studies conducted as part of the programme have shown that after completing the training, patients reported an increase in their level of trust in their doctors, which had a positive impact on their treatment.

For teachers and psychologists seeking to effectively integrate art therapy into the educational process, it is necessary to follow a few key recommendations. First, it is necessary to create an environment of trust and openness in the classroom or therapeutic environment. Teachers should encourage students to express emotions freely, as it is a safe environment that fosters empathy and emotional reflection. In such environments, students can feel comfortable with the practice of art therapy, which often requires deep emotional immersion. Teachers should use a variety of art therapy techniques, including drawing, collage, sculpting, or drama. These techniques allow students to express complex emotions that they may not always express through words. For instance,

emotion drawing allows students to explore feelings through visual language, which stimulates the development of empathy. Group art therapy sessions are also useful for building social empathy and understanding the emotions of others.

An important aspect is an individual approach to each student. Psychologists and teachers should address the emotional and psychological characteristics of students, especially if issues in expressing emotions or interacting with others are present. In such cases, individual sessions or the adaptation of art therapy methods to the needs of a particular person may be useful. This approach will create a more personalised learning experience that addresses the unique needs of each student. Teachers and psychologists should also constantly improve personal empathy skills. They can attend empathy development trainings that teach specific techniques for active listening, empathy and emotional support. Such training will help teachers better understand the emotional needs of students and more effectively integrate art therapy methods into the educational process. Feedback from students is a significant element for teachers. Regular reflective discussions help not only students to analyse personal emotional development, but also teachers to better identify which methods are most effective. Encouraging open discussions helps students develop active listening and empathy skills in real-life situations.

Discussion

Creative practices such as art therapy are indispensable for the personal development and professional training of psychologists. They not only develop emotional sensitivity but also contribute to a deeper understanding of the emotional experiences of others, which is key in psychological practice. Empathy remains a central skill without which a psychologist will not be able to respond adequately to the needs of the client. The results of the study indicate that art therapy helps improve both the emotional and cognitive components of empathy, which makes it an effective

method in psychologists' training. In addition, the importance of this technique is supported by a range of scientific studies. G. Kaimal *et al.* (2020) demonstrated that the use of modern technologies, such as virtual reality, in combination with art therapy not only stimulates the creative process but also activates self-reflection. This contributes to a greater awareness of personal emotions and deeper analysis, which in turn develops empathy for others. The analysis of the study showed that art therapy is an effective method for helping psychology students express their own emotions and understand the feelings of others. This confirms that emotional reflection and empathy can be significantly improved through engagement in the creative process. Most importantly, art therapy provides students with the tools to symbolically and non-verbally express complex emotional states that are often difficult to put into words. This approach develops emotional sensitivity and empathy, which are essential skills for future psychologists. L.J. Morizio *et al.* (2021) also support these findings, demonstrating that young people who are actively involved in art projects show improvements in the cognitive aspects of empathy. Their study highlighted that active involvement in creative processes such as drawing and sculpting contributes to the development of social awareness, as well as the ability to identify the emotions of others. This correlates with the findings of the present study, where group art therapy sessions not only stimulated the development of individual empathy but also improved communication between students. It is also worth noting that active participation in the creative process contributes not only to emotional development but also to cognitive development, as students are forced to analyse and understand various symbolic images and metaphors. This contributes to the development of both emotional sensitivity and the cognitive component of empathy, rendering art therapy a multidimensional tool for training psychologists.

In addition to the development of empathy, art therapy substantially contributes to assisting

students in coping with emotional difficulties and stressful situations. Students who face high demands in their studies and future professional activities often experience emotional stress, which can hinder personal development and professional growth. Art therapy provides them with the opportunity to explore and express their emotions through creativity, which helps to reduce stress and improve emotional well-being. It also creates a space to develop reflective skills that are essential for subsequent client engagement. This is confirmed by S. Stanley & G. Mettilda (2021), demonstrating that social worker students who participated in training programmes with interactive and creative methods showed higher levels of emotional intelligence and reflection. Their findings suggest that art therapy not only helps develop empathy but also increases self-reflection and personal emotion management, which is important for future psychologists and social workers. In addition, it is important to emphasise that creative methods allow students to better understand the causes of their stress and find effective ways to overcome it. As noted by S. Stanley & G. Mettilda (2021), practices such as art therapy help students develop emotional management skills, which reduces the risk of emotional burnout. Thus, art therapy becomes not only a method of developing empathy but also an important component of students' emotional stability, which has a positive impact on their overall professional training.

This study confirms that group art therapy sessions are effective in developing social empathy among students. During such sessions, students not only self-reflect on emotional experiences but also learn and analyse the emotions of others through joint discussions of creative works. This contributes to a deeper understanding of the emotional states of their classmates and improves their empathy skills. An important aspect of these sessions is the collective interaction, which helps students to better understand the social and cultural contexts of their colleagues. S.V. Ouedraogo (2021) confirmed the importance

of intercultural experiences for the development of empathy. Participants in collective art projects that included people from different cultures demonstrated an improved ability to understand social and cultural differences. This is consistent with the findings of this study, as through collective discussion and exchange of ideas, students can learn from the experiences of others, which strengthens their social and emotional skills. In addition, the creative process in the group helps to create a space for the free expression of emotions, which contributes to the creation of a supportive environment necessary for the development of social empathy. Thus, group art therapy sessions are essential for developing not only individual but also social empathy, rendering this approach effective in training psychologists and social work professionals.

The study showed that art therapy has a positive effect on the behavioural reactions of students on non-verbal communication and the ability to recognise emotions through non-verbal signals. This is especially relevant for psychologists, as awareness of non-verbal aspects of communication is an important component of professional interaction with clients. These results are consistent with the findings of K. Jack & S. Illingworth (2023), who also demonstrated that artistic practices, in particular poetry, contribute to the development of emotional sensitivity. Their research highlights that through creativity, a person understands emotions better, thus improving reflection and social skills such as empathy. Additionally, creative activity activates not only the emotional but also the cognitive component of empathy, which allows students to better understand not only themselves but also the state of other people. After art therapy sessions, students reported improvements in their ability to read the emotions of others through non-verbal cues such as facial expressions, gestures, and tone of voice (Jack & Illingworth, 2023). This correlates with the research of other authors who point to the importance of non-verbal communication in therapeutic practice.

This study demonstrated that students who participated in art therapy sessions achieved significant improvements in active listening and emotional reflection. These skills are critical for future psychologists, as they must not only recognise the emotions of their clients but also empathise with them effectively. During art therapy sessions, students learn to better recognise emotional cues through active listening, which in turn helps them to better understand the emotional experiences of others. H. Egan *et al.* (2022) confirmed that techniques such as self-compassion and reflection not only contribute to a better understanding of the emotions of others but also have a positive impact on academic performance and overall emotional well-being. Reflection allows students to become more aware of their own emotions, which is important for building trusting relationships with clients. This is consistent with these findings, where students demonstrated improved active listening and self-reflection skills after art therapy sessions, which contributes to their professional development.

The results of this study highlight certain limitations that should be addressed in further research. The analysis may demonstrate that not all students are ready to immediately accept art therapy as a method of emotional expression, especially without any previous experience with creative practices. This situation emphasises the need for a more detailed study of the factors that influence the effectiveness of art therapy for different groups of students, particularly those who are less emotionally open or do not have developed reflection skills. K. Conradie & E. Swart (2023) also emphasised the importance of an individual approach to teaching empathy. The study noted that the level of emotional sensitivity and readiness for creative expression can vary significantly among students. Some students may need more time and support to open up fully in art therapy sessions. K. Conradie & E. Swart (2023) also suggest the inclusion of other methods, such as literary

works and theatre practices, which can be additional tools for developing empathy, especially for those students who respond better to verbal forms of expression.

Thus, art therapy is an effective tool for developing empathy, emotional sensitivity and self-reflection in students preparing for the profession of psychologist. It promotes not only a better understanding of one's own emotions, but also a deeper analysis of the emotional experiences of others, in particular through collective creative sessions. Participation in creative processes, such as drawing or discussing symbolic images, improves the cognitive and emotional aspects of empathy, active listening skills, and the ability to recognise non-verbal cues.

Conclusions

The study determined that art therapy is effective for the development of empathy in psychology students. The process of engaging with creative practices, including drawing, modelling and other methods of self-expression, improves comprehension of personal emotions and those of others, which is critical for professional training. A significant achievement of the study was that after participating in art therapy sessions, students demonstrated improvements in their ability to reflect, actively listen and perceive non-verbal signals, which are often the main elements of communication in psychological practice.

In practical terms, the results of the study indicate the need to introduce art therapy into the educational process to develop important professional skills. Art therapy sessions help students to become more aware of personal and other people's emotional experiences, which contributes to a more effective performance of future professional duties. Notably, the development of empathy is important for both individual and group therapy as it improves understanding of different perspectives and the quality of interpersonal interaction. Importantly, during the art therapy sessions, certain difficulties were recorded for students who had no previous

experience with creative methods. This indicates the need to individualise teaching approaches and adapt methods for students with different levels of emotional readiness. At the initial stages, some students faced problems in expressing their emotions, which emphasises the importance of additional support from teachers and session leaders.

In addition, the study demonstrated that art therapy is effective in overcoming emotional stress and difficulties in self-expression. This is especially relevant for future psychologists, as they often face emotionally challenging situations in their professional work. The use of art therapy helps students not only to better understand the emotions of others but also to learn how to effectively manage personal emotional reactions, which contributes to emotional stability and increases professional effectiveness. The results of the study also indicate the prospects for the development of group dynamics and collective empathy during joint creative classes. This is essential for the development of interpersonal skills, which is key in the profession of psychology. The students who participated in group art therapy sessions demonstrated improvements in their ability to empathise and work in a team, which can be used to conclude that such methods are relevant in training specialists. Further study should address the long-term impact of art therapy on students' training and professional effectiveness. This will not only improve training methods but also determine which techniques are most effective for developing key skills of psychologists. Thus, the study can become the basis for the development of more systematic training programmes using art therapy methods, which will significantly improve the training of future psychology professionals.

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Conflict of Interest

None.

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Розвиток емпатії у студентів (студентів-психологів) засобами арт-терапії

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Анотація. Дане дослідження було спрямоване на вивчення впливу арт-терапевтичних методів на розвиток здатності до емпатії серед майбутніх психологів. Методологія базувалась на аналізі досліджень щодо групових та індивідуальних занять, де студенти мали змогу самовиражатися через творчість та аналізувати власні емоційні стани. Основні результати дослідження показали, що після арт-терапії студенти значно покращили свої навички у сприйнятті емоцій, здатності до рефлексії та активного слухання. Було виявлено зростання рівня емоційної чутливості та здатності розуміти невербальні сигнали, що є важливою складовою психологічної практики. Окрім цього, групові сесії сприяли розвитку соціальної емпатії, оскільки студенти активно співпереживали одне одному через обговорення робіт і емоційних переживань. Результати також свідчили про позитивний вплив арт-терапії на здатність студентів справлятися з емоційним стресом і складними ситуаціями, що є важливим для їхньої майбутньої професійної діяльності. Результати дослідження показали, що арт-терапія сприяє розвитку емпатії у майбутніх психологів, оскільки стимулює покращення емоційної чутливості та здатності розуміти емоційні стани інших людей. Використання творчих технік, таких як малювання, ліплення та танцювально-рухова терапія, допомагало студентам глибше рефлексувати свої емоції та вдосконалювати навички активного слухання та співпереживання. Після проходження арт-терапевтичних сесій у студентів спостерігалось покращення в емоційній саморефлексії, соціальній емпатії та готовності до професійної взаємодії з клієнтами. Практичне значення даної роботи полягає в тому, що її результати можуть бути використані викладачами психологічних дисциплін, практикуючими психологами та арт-терапевтами для вдосконалення методик розвитку емпатії у студентів і фахівців, що працюють у сфері міжособистісного консультування

Ключові слова: творче самовираження; рефлексія; креативні техніки; соціальна взаємодія; естетичне сприйняття