

# Teaching the Future Military Psychologists by Immersing them into a Pedagogical Situation

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**Abstract:** *The role of military psychologists in a modern army is very important. It has especial significance under conditions of combat activity of troops. In such circumstances a psychologist must apply different professional skills including pedagogical or those directly related to pedagogy. Consequently, training of military psychologists should include a pedagogical component. The effective example of introduction of this component is immersion of military psychologists into pedagogical situations. Such immersion may be implemented by using role-playing games in the form of giving mini-lectures. The research goal is to ensure enhancement of professional skills of future military psychologists through their immersion into a pedagogical situation. Every future military psychologist (cadet) has an opportunity to play a role of a lecturer, an attendee and a person who analyzes a lecture. All roles have requirements and are obligatory for taking. Participants of the role-playing game do self-assessment of their professional skills after finishing it. They use a special questionnaire. Analysis of the answers is basic for assessment both effectiveness of immersion and enhancement of maturity of more than 20 professional skills. Verification of the obtained results was achieved by using methods of mathematical statistics. The results of the investigation are important for enhancement of the training program which should be supplemented with situations of obligatory immersion of military psychologists into pedagogical situations. The proposed method is useful for teaching psychologists of different specialisms.*

**Keywords:** *cadet, military psychologist, pedagogical situation, role-playing game, skills, training.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

### A. Research Relevance and Problem

The psychological service makes an integral part of a modern army. Its significance becomes especially tangible during hostilities. Attention to the quality of training of military psychologists in Ukraine considerably grew just after the onset of hostilities in the Donbas in 2014.

In Ukraine, military psychologists acquire the same classical psychological education as their civil colleagues. They get higher education at the Military Institute of Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv. However, these same psychologists, unlike their civil colleagues, apply professional knowledge under specific conditions. During war events, patients of a military psychologist constantly need psychological follow-up. Therefore, a military psychologist has to continuously work with a large number of servicemen. Note that in Ukraine one psychologist is assigned to a battalion composed of 300-400 soldiers, sergeants and officers. This fact requires from a military psychologist extensive use of not only the individual but also group form of work with servicemen. Conversation, explanation, counseling, account, illustration, demonstration, observation of a group and an individual within a group, collective discussion and other techniques become of very current importance in his work practice. Most of these techniques are peculiar primarily to pedagogical activities in terms of communication, organization of work of a group of people, diagnostics of their abilities, activity, personal traits, achievements etc. Accordingly, certain professional skills of a military psychologist necessary to use the above-noted techniques are of a pedagogical nature. At the same time, the practice of training military psychologists ignores this fact. Consequently, there is a problem of the demand for pedagogical training of military psychologists during their studies at higher education institutions. This research is just devoted to resolution of the said problem.

**Research goal:** to ensure enhancement of professional skills of future military psychologists through their immersion into a pedagogical situation.

**Research objective:** to study sources concerning the research problem in order to identify common and related features of a military psychologist's activities and of pedagogical activities, as well as to establish availability or lack of purposeful pedagogical training of future military psychologists; to substantiate and simulate a pedagogical situation by means of a role-playing game in the form of giving mini-lectures; to assess and analyze enhancement of professional skills of the role-playing game participants based on their self-assessment; and to determine the objective nature of such self-assessment using methods of mathematical statistics.

**The research techniques are as follows:** theoretical analysis, simulation, role-playing game, observation, questioning, generalization, forecasting.

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mathematical statistics techniques (determination of the arithmetic mean, percentage, and Pearson correlation coefficient).

**The research participants** included cadets – future psychologists – of the Military Institute of Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv. The role-playing game involved 46 third-year cadets while questioning covered 45 of them.

### II. ANALYSIS OF SOURCES CONCERNING THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

A number of scientific publications considered the content of the professional activities of military psychologists [1]-[10]. An international survey of military psychologists conducted by experts of the US Army Medical Research Unit-Europe and Walter Reed Army Institute of Research (Heidelberg, Germany) in 23 countries across the world found that psychologists in the armed forces of different countries fulfill similar tasks [2]. The educational, advisory and preventive roles are noted among the nine key ones. This means that individual professional skills of a military psychologist are of a pedagogical nature. Russian experts also confirm this conclusion [5, pp. 134–142]. They reckon organizational and methodological work, psychological training and education, counseling and so on among the professional activities of a military psychologist. Let us also take notice of such related types of activity known to psychologists and educators as psychodiagnostic activity and the ability to identify a problem situation and resolve a problem etc. (Ibidem). Russian scholars also point out the necessity of professional self-improvement of a military psychologist. Note that the capacity for self-improvement requires an ability to analyze one's activities and activities of other individuals, make comparison and so forth. Such a capacity can form in different training situations. Note that the authors of other publications also identify the already mentioned types of activity of a military psychologist. For example, the first of the four volumes of the publication *Military Psychology (Selection, Training and Performance)* [8] refers to training of soldiers. K. Ulianov [11] explicitly emphasizes the use of just general pedagogical methods of stress training for acute combat stress and prevention of uncontrollable combat stress consequences in cadets; in particular, such methods include lectures and interviews. This confirms our view that a number of activities of a military psychologist are pedagogical in nature or related to activities of educators.

Holding just training sessions with servicemen is also referred to in academic papers by those experts who work in the combat zone. For example, Yu. Shyrobokov [12], who ensured psychological training of pilots and servicemen of air defense, missile and radio-radar units for possible captivity in eastern Ukraine in 2014-2017, writes about such form of work.

It is known that building a cohesive team of servicemen is one of the important areas of activity of a military psychologist. This feature is peculiar just to the military environment [7], [10]. In this context, the group form of the psychologist's work that essentially relates to holding a training session is of paramount importance, which

emphasizes the relevance of maturity of his pedagogical skills.

Thus, military psychologists and educators have common professional skills. This enables to carry out formation of some professional skills of a military psychologist in specially simulated and reconstructed pedagogical situations.

Unfortunately, such a practice is not used. Military psychologists of different countries usually have a basic civil psychological education. They gain qualification in military psychology through internship training [13], [14] or a master's program [15]. The latter is typical of the ex-USSR countries where future military psychologists can study not only as students but also as cadets from as early as the first year of study. But in each case curricula do not provide for special pedagogical training of military psychologists. Accordingly, there is no experience of immersion of future military psychologists into a pedagogical situation that would ensure enhancement of their professional skills. It is substantiation and simulation, as well as using such a pedagogical situation that became the next stages of our research and determined its findings.

### III. RESULTS

interaction (conversation, account, discussion, explanation etc.). Up to now, the third-year cadets have not faced such training situations where they could show the said skill. At the same time, such a situation was created in the course of a mini-lecture for future military psychologists where they chose a method of communication depending on the changing nature of interaction. During almost every lecture, we observed stages of information communication, group discussion of a problem, monologic presentation and interpretation of individual experience of

the communication parties, counseling, elaboration of a joint decision and giving advices and recommendations. That is to say, not only standard situations at a lecture but also standard situations of professional communication of a military psychologist were reconstructed. Quality training of cadets for mini-lectures and active work with the audience enabled the future psychologists to achieve substantial enhancement of the skill to choose and use verbal methods of communication.

Before the start of the role-playing game, the cadets' skill to pick questions to an individual or a group of persons had the average maturity level of 5.29 points. We sensitized future military psychologists to picking a few groups of questions. Cadets used some questions at the beginning of the mini-lecture in order to maintain attention and find out attendees' awareness of the talking point. Other questions were prepared as accompanying ones in the course of presentation of core information. The purpose of using those questions was to find out the state of the attendees' perceiving the lecture material. The third group of questions was used at the closing stage of the lecture. By means of those questions, the cadet-lecturer organized a discussion of a certain problem, incited the attendees to seek its resolution, and led the discussion and so on.

Another group of questions could be designed for those cadets who had taken part in hostilities in eastern Ukraine. Using those questions, the lecturer revealed individual traits of the attendees, explored their experience, ensured vividness and fairness of considering a certain problem. Upon completion of the role-playing game, the said skill to pick questions to an individual or a group of persons increased on the average up to 7.64 points or by 32.21%. Note that using questions at the beginning of the mini-lecture also ensured formation of the skill to diagnose readiness of the group to perceive information. This skill eventually increased from 5.38 points by 32.05%.

Another skill with the initial maturity level of 5.38 points increased the most (by 41.15%). It is about the skill to psych oneself up for communication with servicemen. To form this skill, we proposed to cadets to simulate a process of communication with the audience at all its stages. Then a cadet had to imagine the course of each stage, envision difficulties of their implementation, and find a way out of any challenging situations. In other words, future military psychologists fancied what they would do if other cadets were not attentive to their words, that the lecturer would be openly criticized; a conflict situation would emerge during the discussion etc. Gaining readiness to respond to any negative situations, thinking through and even rehearsal of the mini-lecture helped future officers-psychologists to substantially reinforce the skill to psych themselves up for communication with servicemen.

Such psychological preparedness for interaction with servicemen allowed them to be on firm ground during the role-playing game too. This provided conditions for formation of two more skills. One of them is the skill to manage one's own psychological state during interaction with other people (the initial maturity level was of 6.42 points followed by an increase by 28.4%). Another skill concerned one's movement and communicative behavior control. This cadets' skill increased by 27.43% from 6.33 points. We can identify a number of standard situations, when future psychologists managed to repress their excitement and restrain their In order to choose a pedagogical situation we analyzed the content of communication, organizational, diagnostic and other practical skills of a military psychologist that are important when working with a group of individuals. Overall, 23 skills were analyzed, which will be discussed below. We established the similarity of these skills and the skills of the lecture participants. Some part of the skills corresponds to the lecturer's skills, some of them are identical to those of an attendee who actively perceives, analyzes and discusses new information, while another part of a military psychologist's skills is similar to the skills of an individual who analyzes a lecture in detail. Hence, we realized the expediency of creating a pedagogical situation by means of a role-playing game in the form of giving mini-lectures. Those mini-lectures became part of hands-on training for third-year cadets within the framework of the educational subject "Pedagogy and military training."

Each cadet alternately fulfilled three roles. The first one was the role of lecturer. It provided for preparing and giving a mini-lecture lasting 20-25 minutes. Visualization (presentation, posters, video films, demonstration by personal

example etc.), material delivery in accessible language and communication with the audience (dialog, questions, discussion, conversation etc.) were the prerequisites for the lecture.

The attendee role was the second one. We demanded from cadets not only to attentively perceive new information but also to watch the communication and organizational activities of the cadet delivering a lecture.

Fulfillment of the third role required of future military psychologists carrying out a public analysis of the lecture upon its completion. Each of them analyzed at least 20 lectures of other people, as well as his own mini-lecture. In the course of the analysis, cadets paid attention to various factors. They discussed communicative behavior of the lecturer and attendees, organization of interaction between them, visualization quality, and degree of achieving the lecture's goals, lecturer's personality characteristics and so on. We insisted that cadets should emphasize as many strengths and weaknesses of the lecture, as well as of the lecturer's activity and personality as possible. Thereby, future officers-psychologists practiced in analyzing their own communicative and organizational activities and those of other individuals, learned strengths of other cadets and noticed the mistakes made. The performed analysis was intended to avoid such mistakes in the future.

Consequently, based on the results of the role-playing game that lasted 18 academic hours, cadets acquired a busy practice, which ensured formation of a military psychologist's skills in them. Their experience in analysis and self-analysis of communicative, organizational, diagnostic and other activities of the group interaction participants enabled to gain readiness to assess their own relevant skills. We instructed cadets in the criteria for assessing each of the above-mentioned twenty-three practical skills of a military psychologist. Upon completion of the role-playing game, we asked the future officers to make a self-assessment of maturity of these skills at the time the game had begun and for the time being. The rating scale ranged from 0 to 10 points. Processing of the survey findings using mathematical statistics techniques enabled to obtain the following averaged results.

Cadets assessed the initial level of maturity of certain skills in the range from 5.24 to 7.58 points. The final level of maturity of the skills was recorded in the range from 7.38 to 8.93 points. The skills enhancement range varies from 15.24 to 41.15%.

Let us consider individual results of a self-assessment of a military psychologist's skills made by cadets and analyze the influence of the role-playing game in the form of giving mini-lectures on formation of these skills in future officers.

According to the composite self-assessment of the respondents, the cadets' skill to choose and use verbal communication methods had the lowest initial level of maturity (5.24 points). The same skill also had almost the largest increase at the end of the role-playing game (38.29%). Note that it is about a conscious choice of methods depending on the specifics and purpose of communicative emotions during discussions and conflict situations.



Cadets-lecturers recognized those unnecessary movements or words that were involuntary in nature and noticed by other cadets during the discussion of the lecture and will work toward their elimination in the future.

Let us note the importance of not only psychological preparedness of cadets for communication with servicemen but also of practical one. It is about formation of such skills as selection of information for communication and preparation of visualization. The first of these skills increased from 5.38 points by 33.87%. Our recommendations as to selection of information for communication at the mini-lecture concerned its professional and personal relevance to servicemen and such information containing a problem that needed discussion and resolution. Cadets had to choose the topic of their communication themselves. At that, the choice of topic and information material showed to what extent a future military psychologist is able to feel familiar with the interests and values of other cadets. Cadets need the second one of these skills to create optimal conditions for perception of information, as well as for ensuring convincingness of their speeches. They realized that further activity of the attendees in discussing the problem depended on the quality of perception. Therefore, visualization of various kinds and forms was used (slides, films, charts, personal example and so on), including demonstration of rendering medical and psychological aid to servicemen. The diversity of kinds and forms of visualization was useful for all cadets as they could grow in experience. As a result, the skill of cadets to prepare visualization increased on average, according to them, from 5.38 to 7.49 points or by 32.37%.

Cadets also made a self-assessment of a number of skills required for successful communication of a psychologist with a group of servicemen. They assessed the skill to present a personal opinion as improved from 6.67 up to 8.56 points (by 22.57%). At the same time, we asked them to pay attention to the clarity and pace of speech, completeness and reasonableness of thoughts, and presence of inferences and conclusions.

The skill to convince the audience was assessed individually. It increased from 6.27 points by 27.35%. This skill featured an ability to use different types of reasoning—cause-and-effect relations, display materials, experience of eyewitnesses, statistical information, analogy, indirect reasoning etc. Along with this, we insisted on the need to combine different types of reasoning and find the most suitable of its options when using arguments in various situations of communicating with servicemen. The use of reasoning is also integral to another skill. It is about the skill to promptly give full answers to questions. This skill is important for an individual who controls the communication process. The speed of answer enables to avoid unnecessary pauses. The requirement as to completeness makes it possible for an asker to remain satisfied with communication, while for a future psychologist – to achieve his goals in shaping the mentality of servicemen. We demanded that cadets envisage possible questions and get ready in advance to answer them. This skill of the cadets increased on average from 5.82 points by 30.61%.

Such skill of military psychologists as managing attention of a group while interacting with it significantly

increased (from 5.44 to 7.93 points or by 35.56%). We insisted that from the first seconds of communication cadets should take the initiative in intercourse and henceforth should not lose it. In particular, a group discussion of a problem or a debate had to take place only at the initiative of the communication organizer and under his control. Cadets selected themselves means of attention management using questions, visualization, interesting facts etc. The process of managing attention of a group of servicemen depends on the skill to calculate the time of interaction. We demanded that cadets schedule beforehand not only the total time of communication but also the time of its individual stages, which they controlled during the role-playing game. Ultimately, the cadets' skill to calculate the time of interaction substantially increased from 6.16 points by 33.4%.

We sensitized cadets to each stage of interaction with servicemen yielding a certain intended result. New ideas, knowledge, beliefs, experience, as well as joint resolution of a problem could be that result. Such a purpose contributed to developing in them the skill to ensure constructive interaction with a group of persons increased from 5.71 points by 27.73%. The skill of cadets to identify a problem situation before a group of servicemen, which increased from 5.91 to 7.69 points (by 27.99%), aided to develop constructiveness of such interaction. The commonest types of problem situations included contradictions between hands-on experience of servicemen and their knowledge, non-compliance of theory with the needs of the time, imperfection of military material facilities and so on. Collective solution of those problem situations not only enabled to shape new knowledge in servicemen, encouraged toward creativity and self-fulfillment but also created conditions for observation of their personalities. This gave grounds for forming further two skills.

The skill to observe servicemen during one's own conversation (it increased on average from 6.47 points by 26.04%) formed owing to our following requirements for the lecturers. Cadets had to observe the course of the speech perception by individuals and their reactions, identify the presence of interest of the attendees, level of attentiveness, degree of approval of the opinions heard etc. Another skill concerned studying and getting to know servicemen amid communication with them. Cadets claimed it increased on average from 5.98 to 7.93 points, that is, by 27.61%. This skill was manifested in the ability to distinguish in servicemen during communication individual traits and psychological personal qualities, the level of their professional competence etc. Also, they were required to identify the characteristic traits of the group as a whole.

Upon completion of the mini-lecture, each lecturer made a self-analysis of his work with the group. At the same time, there was observed an increase in the skills of a military psychologist to make a self-analysis as a person managing cognitive activity of other people (by 27.98% from 6.27 points) and a person managing communication in a group of servicemen (by 27.27% from 6.07 points).

We set the following as criteria for self-analysis of future psychologists concerning management of cognitive activity of other people: their timely response to the lecturer's information, his communications, giving right answers to questions, timely and appropriate formulation of questions, and the ability to draw conclusions and generalizations. When presenting information, cadets were guided just by those criteria. The criteria for self-analysis of cadets as a person managing communication in a group of servicemen included their fulfilling the requirements set by the communication organizer, adequate response to his initiatives, cooperation with him, trust in him, openness in communication etc.

As previously mentioned, cadets fulfilled not only the lecturer role but also that of attendee (at the same time as observer) and the person analyzing the lecturer's work. Certain professional skills of a military psychologist also formed due to this activity. As a consequence of extensive observation, cadets enhanced their skill to analyze the quality of speech of other persons from 6.6 up to 8.73 points or by 28.27%. Criteria for analyzing the speeches regarded their content- and performance-related aspects. Also, they enhanced their skill to analyze communicative and personal characteristics of servicemen from 6.71 up to 8.51 points (by 21.28%). This skill developed when observing not only the lecturer but also the persons who participated in the discussion of information heard and debates, asked questions, suggested ideas as to resolution of problems etc. Note that after each mini-lecture every cadet publicly analyzed the quality of the speeches and communicative and personal characteristics of the other participants in the role-playing game. Such an analysis method enabled them to learn from one another to pay attention to some characteristics or other. Every time, those characteristics became increasingly total and reasoned.

The attendee role allowed cadets to develop such skills important for a military psychologist as participating in a collective discussion of and solving a problem situation (an increase by 22.57% from 6.42 points) and having regard for the opinion of another person (an increase by 15.24% from 7.58 points). Our requirements as to participation in a collective discussion included activity, correctness, tolerance, frankness of cadets etc. As shown by the self-assessment results, the skill to have regard for the opinion of another person increased the most among the other skills. This goes to prove that such a skill actively formed in future psychologists not only in the course of the role-playing game but also earlier -- during other training activities. This is evidenced by the highest self-assessment of maturity of this skill before the start of the role-playing game. It is our opinion, however, that even the stated increase (by 15.24%) is rather significant.

We checked the objective nature of the cadets' self-assessment by identifying a relationship between the average final value of the self-assessment of each cadet's skills and the assessment the instructor awarded him for his participation in the role-playing game. The assessment from the instructor (up to 100 points) was integrated for the quality of giving mini-lectures and public analyses of the mini-lectures of other cadets. We assume that the level of maturity of a cadet's skills tells upon successfulness of his activities, which was appreciated by the instructor.

To identify the said relationship, we used the Pearson correlation coefficient [16]. For a group of cadets,  $r=0.402$ , while the significance levels of 0.288 ( $p=0.05$ ) and 0.372 ( $p=0.01$ ) correspond to the sample size ( $n=45$ ) [17]. As we can see, the correlation coefficient is in the range of significance, which determines a direct relationship between the average values of the self-assessment of the cadets' skills and the instructor's assessment. This confirms the objective nature of the self-assessment.

#### IV. DISCUSSION

Thus, the conducted research is devoted to solving the problem of the demand for pedagogical training of military psychologists during their studies at higher education institutions. We analyzed sources concerning the research problem and identified common and related features of a military psychologist's activities and of pedagogical activities; however, we did not find examples of purposeful pedagogical training of future military psychologists. This latter fact shows the lack of practice in immersing future military psychologists in pedagogical situations.

Based on the analysis of twenty-three skills of a military psychologist he needs when working with a group of servicemen, we chose a pedagogical situation immersion into which will ensure development of those skills in cadets. This situation represents a lecture while the means to reconstruct it involved a role-playing game whose participants alternately fulfilled different roles (those of lecturer, attendee, and person analyzing the lecture).

We can talk of the integrated nature of forming in cadets of professional skills of a military psychologist during a role-playing game in the form of giving mini-lectures. That activity enabled to significantly raise the level of maturity of the cadets' skills in their work with a group of servicemen. Such skills concerned presentation and substantiation of a personal opinion, group communication management, examination of the personalities of servicemen, analytical activity etc. The high effectiveness of the role-playing game in this respect is confirmed by the results of cadets' self-assessment of their skills as psychologists. Those results of the self-assessment have a high coefficient of correlation with the results of assessment of their work by the instructor, that is, confirm the validity of our conclusions.

#### V. CONCLUSION

The effects of our study are significant for the teaching practice in universities because we gained new experience in using of role-playing games. The obtained results allow updating the military psychologists training program and define the role-playing game in the form of giving mini-lectures as its mandatory element. It is also advisable that this role-playing game is used by refresher courses for military psychologists who have hands-on experience. The positive results of the role-playing game enable to expand the practice of using this training method in order to further take account of the specifics of a military psychologist's work when cadets acquire classical psychological education.

Accordingly, development and testing of the following role-playing games is a subject of further scientific research. Also, further prospects for the described research consist in substantiating and testing the other effective ways of immersing future psychologists into a pedagogical situation in addition to a role-playing game in the form of giving mini-lectures.

The results of the research are important and relevant for vocational psychological education and applied psychology not only in the higher military educational institutions because civil psychologists use the pedagogical skills in their professional activity as well. It may be working with children for developing of social and communicative skills in them, group therapy, relief work with people who are victims of disasters and etc.

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