



# Incorporation of Improvisation Exercises to Improve Communication Skills among Student Pharmacists

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## Objective

- To describe students' perception of improvisation exercises as part of a communication skills workshop.

## Background

- It is crucial for pharmacists to master necessary communication skills to appropriately interact with both patients and other health care professionals.
- Standard 2.2 of the AACP Curriculum Outcomes and Entrustable Professional Activities (COEPA) focuses on communication skills, stating that students should, "actively engage, listen, and communicate verbally, nonverbally, and in writing when interacting with or educating an individual, group, or organization."<sup>1</sup>
- Improvisation exercises are an effective method to teach and reinforce communication skills in pharmacy education.<sup>2</sup>
- Improvisation exercises enable students to:<sup>2</sup>
  - ✓ Improve professional communication skills.
  - ✓ Focus on the moment.
  - ✓ Improve listening and observing skills.
  - ✓ Experience in responding.
  - ✓ Increase comfort level of speaking in front of a group.

## Methods

- An 80-minute workshop incorporating improvisation exercises was added to a clinical skills course for 1<sup>st</sup> year students in Summer 2021.
- Improvisation-trained actors employed by the University's Clinical Skills and Simulation Center led the workshop, with 1 facilitator per group of 10 students.
- Faculty held a 1-hour training session with facilitators in advance and shared a guide which included instructions and discussion points for 4 exercises (Table 1).
- After the workshop, students completed an anonymous survey which asked them to rate their level of agreement with different statements using a 5-point Likert scale and respond to open-ended questions.
- Data from 2 years of the workshop were retrospectively analyzed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis.

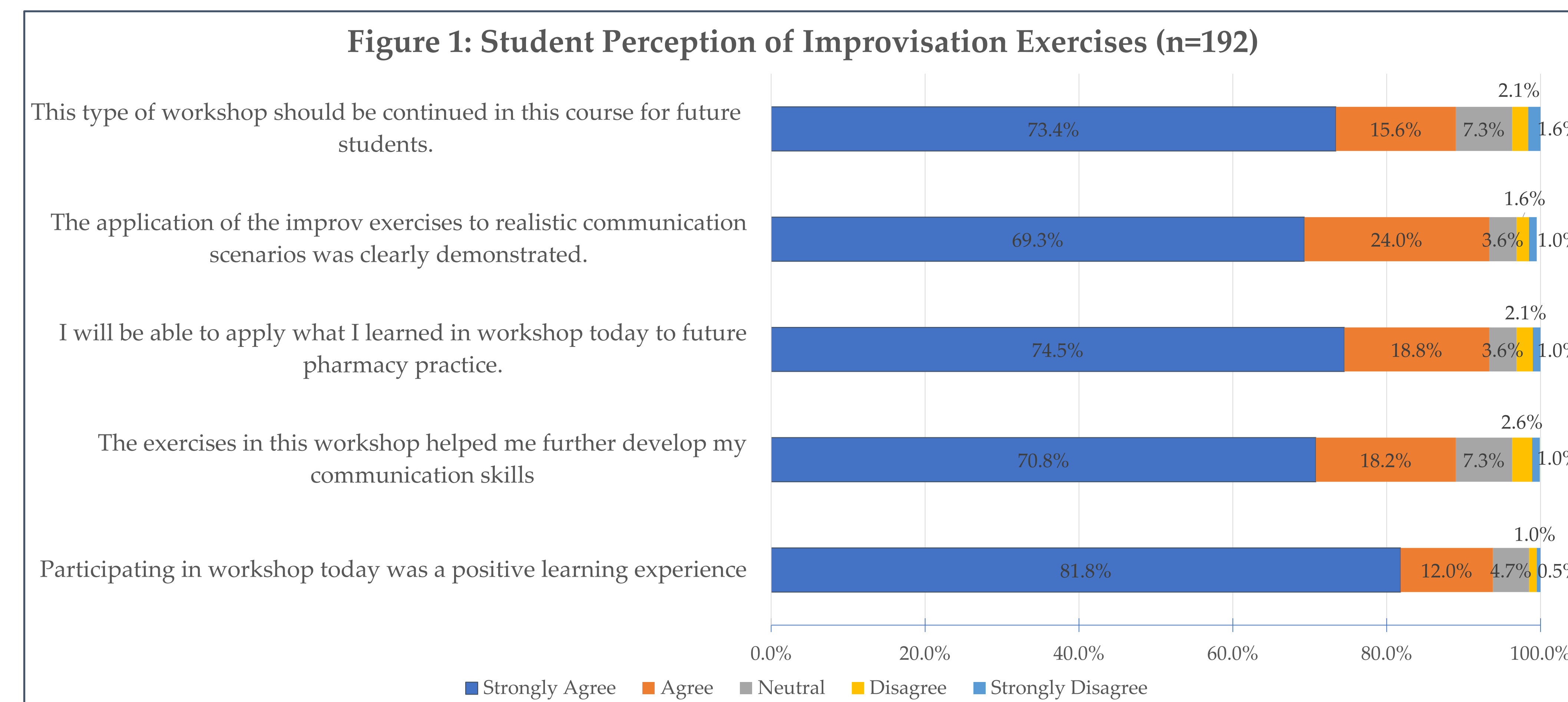
## Methods (continued)

**Table 1: Facilitator Guide Synopsis**

Exercise	Instructions	Discussion Points
Repeated Patterns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>While standing in a circle, one student at a time makes eye contact with another student and says their name, until all students have been included.</li> <li>This pattern is repeated until established and then a new topic is introduced.</li> <li>Students then try to complete both patterns simultaneously.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Healthcare settings can have a lot of distractions that need to be blocked out to focus on a given task or communicate with a patient.</li> <li>Communication requires staying in the moment and listening to what is being said.</li> </ul>
"Yes, and..."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In pairs, students have a 1-2 minute conversation on an assigned topic responding with "Yes, and..." for one round each and then "Yes, but..."</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"Yes" validates what the other person is saying which can help a patient feel heard and promote collaboration.</li> <li>"And" advances the conversation whereas "no" or "but" stops communication.</li> </ul>
One Word Story	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>While in a circle, each student says one word at a time to advance a story when given a title.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Communication requires staying in the moment and listening to what is being said. Thinking ahead and anticipating what may be said can lead to errors.</li> <li>In practice, each team member must use information from the prior providers to move the patient closer to achieving their goals of care.</li> </ul>
Time Traveler	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Working in pairs, students take turns playing a time traveler from ~200 years ago and someone in the current day.</li> <li>The current day student explains modern technology to the time traveler.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Good communication is audience-centered.</li> <li>Analogies can help bridge gaps in knowledge but it is important to think about what your audience already knows to determine what analogies to use.</li> </ul>

## Results

- Over 2 course offerings, 192 students participated in the workshop and completed the post-workshop survey.



- 192 student responses to "What did you learn today that you think you will be able to apply in the future when you work as a pharmacist or pharmacy intern?" were analyzed by investigators. Thirty responses (15.6%) were excluded due to lack of detail.

**Table 2: Thematic Analysis of Student Responses (n=162)**

Identified Theme	Number (%)
Patient-Centered	125 (77.2%)
Communication Process	43 (26.5%)
Nonverbal	22 (13.6%)
Situational Management	23 (14.2%)

## Discussion

- A majority of students (77.2%) indicated that these exercises helped them understand the importance of patient-centered communication, while 26.5% of students indicated that these exercises solidified the importance of the communication process including active listening.
- Post exercise discussion may have contributed to students' ability to relate these skills to the healthcare environment.
- The use of trained improvisational actors added a unique perspective and may have contributed to the learning experience.
- Limitations:
  - ✓ Different facilitators may have emphasized different key points potentially influencing students' responses.
  - ✓ These exercises were limited to one workshop.

## Conclusions

- Including improvisation exercises within a communication skills workshop was well-received by pharmacy students.
- Future evaluation of the impact of such exercises on communication skills is warranted.

### References:

- Medina MS, Farland MZ, Malcom DR, et al. AACP Curriculum Outcomes and Entrustable Professional Activities (COEPA) 2022. Available from: <https://www.aacp.org/sites/default/files/2022-11/coepa-document-final.pdf>. Accessed on June 27, 2023.
- Boesen KP, Herrier RN, Apgar DA, Jackowski RM. Improvisational exercises to improve pharmacy students' professional communication skills. Am J Pharm Educ. 2009;73(2):35. doi: 10.5688/aj730235.

### Disclosures

All authors of this presentation have nothing to disclose concerning possible financial or personal relationships with commercial entities that may have a direct or indirect interest in the subject matter of this presentation.