

Interprofessional Education: What Students Want

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Introduction

Interprofessional Education (IPE) occurs when “students are deliberately exposed to interactive learning opportunities with those outside their profession and learn to collaborate with other professionals to improve education and service provision outcomes” (Zraick et al., 2014). The importance of IPE is widely recognized across health-related professions but available research on IPE tends to report IPE outcomes for students as a single group without examining potential differences in perceptions across professions, and often excludes professions less directly related to healthcare. IPE activities are also generally developed by faculty, many of whom do not have formal training as IPE educators.

Our study addressed these gaps by surveying students across a wide range of professions on their interests and perceptions related to IPE. The primary goal of the study was to gain a better understanding of what students expect or want from IPE experiences. We also sought to determine whether perceptions of IPE varied based on student characteristics such as profession, gender, year of study, and age. We developed original questions and adapted others from previously published surveys related to student perspectives on IPE (Curran et al, 2008; Rosenfield et. al, 2011; Schmedding-Bartley & Karasinski, 2020). Our questions focused on students’ perception of the overall importance of IPE and their perceived value of different features of IPE experiences.

Research Questions

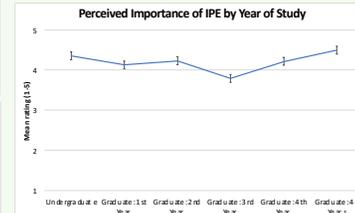
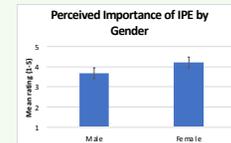
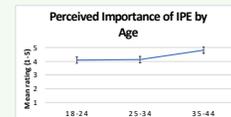
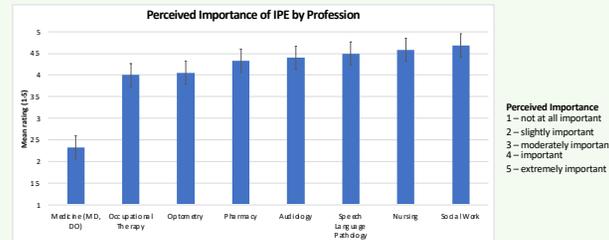
1. How do students rate the overall importance of IPE and do ratings differ based on student profession, gender, age, and year of study?
2. What features of IPE experiences are most valued by students?

Methods

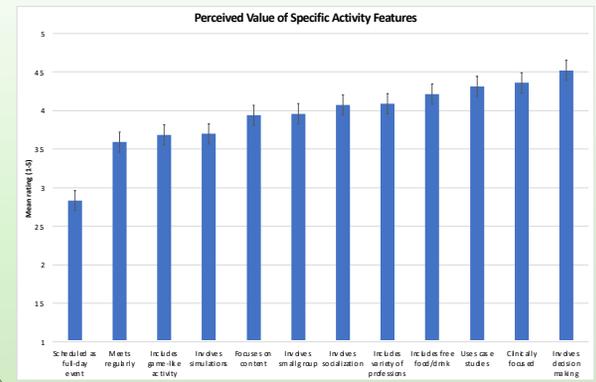
Participants

Professions	Total	Female	Male
Optometry	90	75	15
Speech Language Pathology	18	18	0
Social Work	16	14	2
Nursing	15	14	1
Other	11	8	3
Medicine (MD, DO)	9	5	4
Pharmacy	6	4	2
Audiology	6	6	0
Occupational Therapy	5	5	0
Physician Assistant	4	3	1
Business	2	1	1
Public Health	2	2	0
Physical Therapy	1	1	0
Dentistry	1	0	1
Law	1	0	1
Grand Total	187	156	31

Results



Perceived Value
1 – no value
2 – minimal value
3 – neutral
4 – moderate value
5 – significant value



Conclusions

1. Medical students rated the importance of IPE lowest relative to all other professions included in the survey. This finding is consistent with previous research (Curran et al., 2008) and may indicate misunderstanding among medical students of the roles and responsibilities of other professions. This difference may be due to medical students misunderstanding roles and responsibilities of other professions and associated challenges in collaborating effectively with many disciplines.
2. Relative to males, females viewed IPE as more important. Similar findings have been reported elsewhere (Curran et al., 2008), suggesting females may be more open to collaboration and teamwork.
3. Perceived importance of IPE varied by age and year of study. This finding may indicate increased appreciation of IPE based on work and life experiences. Lower ratings of IPE importance by 3rd year graduate students may reflect students’ strong identities as members of their profession after several years of intensive uni-professional training. This result could also be explained by the increased difficulty of academic coursework in Year 3 and limited focus on collaborative practice and patient care during that phase of training.
4. Features that are most commonly implemented in IPE events and frequently described in the literature (e.g., large events that include many disciplines and involve game-like activities or icebreakers) were rated as least valuable, suggesting the potential need to reconsider how to best provide meaningful IPE experiences to students.

Limitations & Future Directions

Although we collected data from a large range of specialties/fields, sample sizes varied considerably, and some professions were not well represented. In many cases, profession and gender were also confounded. Additional data are needed to disentangle these factors and clarify their individual effects on IPE perceptions. Many survey respondents also had limited IPE experience. Future research is needed to determine whether the perceptions we observed hold true when participants are engaged in more IPE and are rating activities based on actual experience.

Key References

- Curran, V. R., Sharpe, D., Forristall, J., & Flynn, K. (2008). Attitudes of health sciences students towards interprofessional teamwork and education. *Learning in Health and Social Care*, 7(3), 146-156.
- Rosenfield, D., Oandasan, L., & Reeves, S. (2011). Perceptions versus reality: A qualitative study of students’ expectations and experiences of interprofessional education. *Medical Education*, 45(5), 471-477.
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- Zraick, R. L., Harten, A. C., & Hagstrom, F. (2014). Interprofessional education and practice: A primer for training future clinicians. *Perspectives on Issues in Higher Education*, 17(2), 39-46.