

Assessing the Impact of Virtual Versus In-Person Learning on Pharmacy Student's Communication Skills

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Abstract

Background: Virtual education has greatly expanded its presence since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. With more utilization of virtual education, there has been discussion of how it compares to traditional in-person learning, especially in more practical or hands-on focused learning domains. Communication is one of these domains, and one that is vital to professionals including pharmacists. The goal of this study was to assess how virtual learning impacted the development and assessment of communication skills in pharmacy students at one institution, Southern Illinois University – Edwardsville School of Pharmacy.

Methods: This study was a survey design that was sent out electronically at the start of the 2022 spring semester to students in their second and third professional years. Students in their second year were the in-person cohort while students in their third year were the virtual cohort. Basic demographic information was collected from participants including past pharmacy work experience, experience with online classwork, and level of online engagement in hobbies. Domains relating to communication skill development were assessed in the survey. All domains were analyzed using the Mann-Whitney U test.

Results: A majority of the domains assessed of participants had median scores that favored in-person learning over virtual learning, yet these results were not statistically significant. There was one statistically significant finding that if students were presented the opportunity to repeat their learning again, they would not prefer virtual learning (median values for both groups = 5 [Disagree], p-value < 0.5).

Conclusion: Pharmacy students preferred in-person learning environments over virtual learning environments for instruction on how to develop their communication skills and prepare for standardized assessment.