Exploring Preparedness, Motivation, Communication Tools and Strategies for the Engagement of Facilitators in Interprofessional Education

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Abstract

Interprofessional education (IPE) case-based events aim to nurture effective communication and active engagement among students from diverse disciplines. Facilitators play a critical role in the success of these events, yet limited research explores how to best prepare and motivate facilitators to fully engage students. This study addresses this gap by examining structured facilitator preparedness, motivational factors, and communication tools that enhance student engagement. Seven facilitators with prior IPE experience participated in semi-structured interviews to share their perspectives on preparation, motivation, and effective communication strategies. The interviews, lasting 45 to 60 minutes, were guided by questions adapted from Dalhousie University's Interprofessional Facilitation Scale (IFS) and included standardized prompts for discussion. Transcriptions of the sessions were analyzed to identify actionable strategies for facilitator development. The results revealed that structured preparation materials, such as case study notes and facilitation guides, significantly enhanced facilitators' confidence and readiness to lead sessions. Motivation was closely tied to facilitators' commitment to creating interdisciplinary collaboration and improving student learning outcomes. Effective communication tools, including structured prompts and guided discussion frameworks, were found to support student engagement and meaningful group interactions.

This study provides educational institutions with practical strategies for enhancing facilitator training and support, emphasizing the importance of tailored preparation, motivational reinforcement, and effective communication techniques. These findings contribute to the development of stronger interdisciplinary collaboration and enriched student learning experiences in IPE settings.

Keywords: interprofessional education, facilitator, case-based learning activity

1. Introduction

Interprofessional education (IPE) has emerged as a vital teaching tool in higher education, particularly in the realm of healthcare, where it plays a pivotal role in developing team skills, compassion, and effective communication among students from different disciplines. Within the realm of healthcare, the significance of IPE events lies in its ability to empower students to collaborate, ultimately enhancing the quality of patient care (Reeves et al., 2016). In this collaborative setting, it is not only the students who are integral but also the facilitators who guide this process. During these IPE sessions, facilitators serve as a pillar in sustaining open lines of communication among students by employing prompts and structured discussions to stimulate meaningful interactions (Smith et al., 2021). They act as a bridge connecting knowledge and expertise which enriches the learning experience. However, it is essential to recognize that these events' success hinges on the recruitment of competent facilitators, their effective training for the delivery of the IPE content, and their active engagement with students through the activities. Adequate training and provision of guiding materials are prerequisites for facilitators' preparedness, ensuring they are well-equipped to engage students effectively and achieve the set learning outcomes for promoting a positive IPE experience (El-Awaisi et al., 2020). Additionally, the intrinsic motivation of facilitators is equally important in student collaboration and participation. Encouraging facilitators to stay dedicated and passionate about interprofessional core competencies, such as teamwork, communication, and roles/responsibilities, for shared patient-centric decision-making promotes productive interprofessional learning environments (Schmid et al., 2021; Interprofessional Education Collaborative, 2023).

When facilitators actively engage in IPE events, having essential resources for training and support becomes crucial for ensuring a successful learning experience. These resources not only guide the delivery of the educational programs but also contribute to enhancing facilitators' competencies, skill sets, and motivation in the context of IPE (Paignon et al., 2022; Son et al., 2023). While there is existing research that highlights the qualities of effective facilitators, such as preparedness, motivation, and communication skills, the challenge lies in the lack of strategies that address how to develop these qualities in facilitators. One notable initiative in this regard is the Interprofessional Educators' Competencies, Assessment, and Training (IPEcat), which explores educators' competencies. Additionally, the Objective Structured Teaching Exercise (OSTE) offers a valuable tool by simulating IPE scenarios where facilitators can practice leading groups and sharing experiences, with a focus on interpersonal communication skills (McCutcheon et al., 2017). However, these tools may not align perfectly with the institution-based case scenario and facilitator preparation intended for their students.   Despite the availability of these resources and training opportunities, a noticeable gap exists in the literature. Few, if any, studies address the specific strategies needed to prepare and motivate facilitators effectively. This gap is critical, as facilitators who are well-prepared, motivated, and equipped with effective communication tools are central to the success of these sessions.

This study is significant within the context of IPE, as it seeks to explore actionable strategies for enhancing the role of facilitators in collaborative events. By examining specific methods to promote preparedness, motivation, and effective communication, this study aims to address the critical gap in the development of facilitators, moving beyond established knowledge of their qualities to offer practical approaches for institutional support. The main objective of this study is to investigate the factors that contribute to facilitator preparedness, offering insights into foundational strategies that lead to successful IPE sessions. Specifically, it emphasizes ways to structure training and support that help facilitators orchestrate interprofessional events effectively. The second objective focuses on identifying and assessing the motivational factors that drive facilitators to actively engage in interprofessional collaboration, aiming to reveal strategies for creating sustained commitment and enthusiasm. Finally, this study examines the communication tools and techniques facilitators employ to optimize student engagement, offering practical approaches that enhance interaction and learning in IPE settings.

IPE Event Background

The 4th Annual "In Our Shoes" event (Garwood et al., 2022), is a 4-hour synchronous virtual IPE-themed gathering that engages students led by voluntary faculty facilitators from medical laboratory science, mortuary science, nurse anesthesia, occupational therapy, pathologists' assistant, pharmacy, physical therapy, physician assistant, radiation therapy, and radiologic technology programs at the Eugene Applebaum College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences (EACPHS) at Wayne State University. The IPE components included a presentation by program faculty on profession-specific roles, a small group case-based learning activity where teams demonstrate interprofessional collaboration, and a panel of experts answering student-driven questions addressing the event's theme.

Spanning two days, 15 facilitators from different professions within the EACPHS guided groups of 10-12 students through a case-based learning activity centered on the opioid epidemic and pain management. Each team, comprised of students from different disciplines, was led by a faculty facilitator who stimulated discussions and guided the learning activity.

2. Methods

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design using semi-structured interviews to explore the preparedness, motivation, and communication strategies of facilitators involved in an interprofessional education (IPE) event. The qualitative approach was chosen to capture rich, detailed insights into the lived experiences and perceptions of facilitators, enabling a deeper understanding of the factors contributing to their effectiveness in leading IPE sessions.

Study Participants

Facilitators invited to join the study were faculty currently employed in the College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences who were facilitators in the 4th annual "In Our Shoes" event., excluding those on the Interprofessional Education (IPE) committee to avoid potential bias. Of the 15 participating facilitators, only 12 were deemed eligible for inclusion in this study, with 7 agreeing to participate.

Data Collection

Data were collected through 45–60-minute semi-structured interviews conducted by committee members outside the participants' disciplines to ensure an unbiased process. The interviews focused on facilitators' perceptions of their preparation, motivation, and the use of communication tools in leading IPE case-based learning activities. The questions, adapted from Dalhousie University's Interprofessional Facilitation Scale (IFS), provided a structured yet flexible framework for eliciting in-depth responses (Sargeant et al., 2010).

Each interview session began with a standardized PowerPoint presentation outlining the objectives and scope of the discussion. Participants responded to 10 prompts designed to facilitate multi-layered conversations about their experiences. Dedicated time was allocated for follow-up questions and open discussion, allowing facilitators to elaborate on their insights. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy and completeness in capturing participants' perspectives. Table 1 Interview Questions

Table 1. Participant Demographics

Participant	Gender	Program	Faculty Years	Times IPE Facilitator	IPE Delivery Platform In-person /Zoom
1	F	PA	4	4	1,3
2	F	OT	22	2	0 2
3	F	RTT	3	2	0.2
4	M	NA	2	2	0,2
5	F	NA	4	4	1,3
6	F	PA	9	4	1,3
7	F	Pharm	20	3	1,2

Nurse Anesthesia (NA), Occupational Therapy (OT), Pharmacy (Pharm), Physician Assistant (PA), Radiation Therapy (RTT)

Facilitator Preparation

The IPE committee developed resources for facilitator preparation available as an embedded part of the IPE course within the university's learning management system. Facilitators were granted advance access to the course and all the available resources. Furthermore, the course, called the Interprofessional Education and Collaborative, included modules designed to help facilitators understand the expectations regarding the roles and responsibilities of the students.

The *Facilitators Guide* provided a concise overview of the event, including objectives, case study, and best practices for promoting interprofessional learning and collaboration. A summary of discipline specific roles and responsibilities was included to foster engagement within the interprofessional student team. In addition, prompts were included in the domains of values, ethics and cultural competencies for enriching student discussions.

For quick reference, the *Tips for Facilitators Guide* covered key event information, including logistics, contact details, event goals, and bulleted roles for facilitators to enhance student engagement.

A standardized *In Our Shoes Group Session Presentation* PowerPoint was developed to guide group discussions. This presentation introduced the case study, aligned with IPE event goals and student expectations, and was structured with an opening icebreaker and a closing assignment. The case study included prompts for discussing how each represented profession contributed to patient care, ensuring educational equity among professions.

A 20-minute *Facilitator's Video* provided an overview of the learning management system and highlighted available resources. This video navigated the student and facilitator sections of the course, expanding on logistics and educational highlights within the guided PowerPoint.

An email was sent to all facilitators seven days before the IPE event, welcoming and thanking them. It included preparatory information such as the agenda, module link, and the *Facilitator's Video*. Facilitators were also offered additional support and encouraged to ask any questions.

Data Analysis

The data analysis employed a deductive qualitative approach guided by predefined categories derived from the study's aims, existing literature, and the IFS framework. A team of six researchers independently reviewed and coded the interview transcripts to ensure validity and consistency. This thematic analysis identified recurring patterns and significant insights related to facilitator preparedness, motivation, and communication strategies. The generated codes were grouped into broader categories, forming the basis for key themes that highlighted effective facilitator qualities and actionable strategies. These findings provide institutions with practical methods to enhance facilitator development, engagement, and effectiveness in interprofessional education (IPE). The methodology ensured credibility and applicability, offering a robust framework for exploring facilitator experiences and improving institutional support in IPE contexts.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to institutional policies and was granted exemption status by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) due to its low-risk nature. All participants provided informed consent, and confidentiality was maintained throughout the research process.

3. Results

Fifteen facilitators participated in the IPE event, with 12 meeting the eligibility criteria for inclusion in this study. Of these, 7 agreed to participate in comprehensive semi-structured interviews. This diverse group, with experience levels ranging from 2 to 25 years in faculty roles, included 6 female and 1 male participant. All had prior experience leading IPE case-based learning activities, contributing to a rich dataset for analysis. The primary themes identified were: Structured Preparation: Highlighting the value of detailed training materials and case-based guides. Facilitator Motivation: Emphasizing the intrinsic and extrinsic factors that drive facilitators to engage effectively. Communication Strategies: Focusing on the role of empathy, prompts, and inclusivity in fostering student collaboration. Table 2 Participant Demographics

Table 2. Focus Group Questions

IPE Focus Group	
Question 1	• What motivated you to get involved with the IPE event?
	• Would you do it again after facilitating this event?
	• Please explain.
Question 2	• Did you feel that the facilitator's materials, (guide, case study notes, video) helped prepare you to lead the student group?
	• How did you prepare, were you able to advance your knowledge, and what did you learn?
Question 3	• Did you feel that the facilitation materials, such as the ice breaker, case study and group session encouraged students from different professions to learn about, from, and with each other?
Question 4	• Did the case study encourage members of all professions to contribute to discussion/ decisions in the group session? If so, how?
Question 5	• Do you feel that less or more time is needed for the case study activity with students? If so, what is your suggested time frame for this part of the interprofessional education experience?
Question 6	• Do you feel the case study allowed for students to share their professional opinions, perspectives, and values relative to patient care and collaborative practice?
	• If so, how?
Question 7	• How did you use effective communication skills to facilitate the case study?
	• Did you need to clarify and resolve misunderstanding and conflict?
Question 8	• Did you feel the case study provided space to explore the goals and learning objectives set forth for the case?
Question 9	• Do you feel the learning environment in which the principles of interprofessional education were demonstrated or clearly explained (e.g., did not focus on group; acknowledged all professionals' contributions; acknowledged, respected, celebrated diversity in group)?
	• Please provide examples.
Question 10	• Overall, how engaged were you and your students? How did you feel at the end of the event?
	• Can you provide examples?

Structured Preparation of Facilitators

A key factor to a successful IPE event is facilitator preparation. Comprehensive training includes various methods and guidance to ensure facilitators are prepared to provide an experience that aligns with desired learning outcomes. The 7 participants who participated in the interview sessions provided insightful feedback on the materials and training resources

provided to them before the IPE event. Facilitators reported that comprehensive training resources, such as case study notes, structured guidance, and accessible preparatory materials, were critical in helping them feel ready and confident. Many facilitators found that these resources not only provided a clear framework for the event but also allowed them to approach discussions with a well-rounded understanding of interprofessional collaboration. Specifically, the case studies and training modules were highlighted as effective tools in structuring the sessions and promoting a consistent approach to interdisciplinary engagement. Most felt that the training materials were practical and effective. One participant stated, "The facilitator materials and case study notes were extremely helpful, provided step-by-step guidance and allowed us to follow along well. They provided a deeper understanding of other programs, insight on what prior research needed to be done, and helped lead the discussions." Another commented that they, "thought it was very well organized and prepared, from the instructions on what to do and when to do it, as well as the PowerPoint slides with the notes below it." Regarding how the case study specifically supported facilitators in meeting learning outcomes, feedback was positive. One participant expressed that, "the case study included certain details that properly outlined an ethical, diverse, and equitable case that reached all objectives." In addition, another stated that the case study, "gave the students insight and allowed the group to discuss what resources, lifestyle, and support that the mock patient could have had in their life." Overall, there was a consensus amongst the facilitators that the materials and training provided supported adequate preparation and assisted in helping to provide a successful IPE experience that aligned with the desired learning outcomes.

Facilitator Motivation

Motivational factors also played a significant role, with facilitators noting that their interactions with students and the positive, collaborative atmosphere with enthusiasm and a sense of purpose. For some facilitators, their commitment to IPE stemmed from personal values and a belief in the importance of interdisciplinary learning. Positive feedback from students and visible engagement were also key motivators, reinforcing facilitators' willingness to participate in future events. The success of an IPE event hinges significantly on the motivation of its facilitators. This study explored not only facilitators' existing motivation levels but also strategies to enhance their motivation in the context of interprofessional collaboration, aiming to uncover what drives effective communication and teamwork. During the interview sessions, positive feedback emerged regarding their motivation and engagement levels during the IPE event. The seven participants in this study expressed their willingness to volunteer again as facilitators, highlighting the importance they placed on interprofessional education and their positive experiences as facilitators. Some participants had volunteered for this IPE event in the past and understood the importance of interprofessional education, so it was a "no-brainer" for them to volunteer again. Two participants noted the importance of uniting various disciplines for mutual learning, addressing the value of the event. One participant's response captured this sentiment, stating, "It's an important event that brings the programs together, increases awareness, and allows others to learn about different domains." Another participant noted, "The concepts and the case were eye-opening for some people who were not aware of the actual challenges of a person experiencing homelessness." Engagement between facilitators and students was another key factor enhancing facilitator motivation. One participant stated "All students were engaged every year I have facilitated. I think they thought it was interesting, and I feel that even the facilitators learn something new every year", another participant expressed "both facilitators and students were engaged and participated well" demonstrating how student interaction fuels facilitator enthusiasm. Overall, these insights suggest that to sustain and build motivation, institutions should emphasize the event's real-world impact, provide relatable case studies, and develop a sense of interdisciplinary learning and shared growth among facilitators and students. By highlighting these factors, facilitators experience greater motivation through meaningful engagement, professional growth, and collaborative learning opportunities.

Communication Strategies

In terms of communication tools, facilitators employed various strategies to optimize student engagement, including using prompts, supportive language, and empathy-focused approaches. These techniques encouraged students to participate actively and created a safe, inclusive space for discussions. Facilitators noted that these tools were instrumental in developing meaningful interactions, allowing students to learn from one another's perspectives and enhancing the overall quality of the IPE sessions. The facilitation resources were designed to create a learning environment where students felt both supported and encouraged to engage actively with the material. One key aspect of effective facilitation is the use of language that welcomed student participation and invited a deeper exploration of ideas. Facilitators frequently used prompts that validated student contributions, helping them feel comfortable expanding on topics. For instance, if a question is met with silence, the facilitator would respond by urging the students to delve deeper into their thoughts, encouraging them to communicate their ideas fully. A facilitator stated, "If they had not heard from a student in a while, they provided some support for them to contribute." Creating a safe, inclusive space was also key to fostering open dialogue. One respondent stated, "Students were assured that they were in a safe environment and did not always have to be politically correct." This approach allowed students to express themselves without fear of judgment, leading to richer, more meaningful discussions The facilitators also emphasized empathy, reminding students of the diverse backgrounds

and experiences of those they may encounter in their careers. If students were more familiar with a topic such as diversity and homelessness, this brought compassion when contributing to the conversation. A facilitator disclosed to the students that "Empathy towards people (is needed) because everyone comes from a different background, and anything could happen to anybody." By promoting compassion, facilitators helped students approach case study discussions thoughtfully and with a broader perspective. Overall, these tools, validating contributions, supporting inclusivity, and encouraging empathy, created a space where students felt empowered to explore, participate fully, and learn from one another's perspectives. By employing these communication strategies, facilitators helped make the learning environment both dynamic and supportive, encouraging genuine engagement and collaborative learning.

4. Discussion

The findings highlight the critical role of structured training and tailored support in enhancing facilitator preparedness for interprofessional education (IPE). Effective facilitation depends on a clear understanding of learning objectives and essential interprofessional collaboration skills, including respect for roles, teamwork, conflict management, and self-awareness (Van Diggele et al., 2020). Providing facilitators with practical resources, such as detailed case studies and step-by-step guidance, promotes a consistent and effective approach to IPE.

Facilitators in this study valued the support provided, describing the training materials as well-organized, thorough, and user-friendly. The case study resources were particularly noted for their utility in preparing facilitators to guide students effectively in achieving learning objectives. These findings align with research by McCutcheon et al. (2017), who demonstrated the effectiveness of structured exercises, such as Objective Structured Teaching Exercises (OSTE), in preparing facilitators for IPE. Similarly, Paignon et al. (2022) emphasized the importance of globally agreed-upon facilitator competencies, further supporting the importance of detailed training resources like those used in this study. By equipping facilitators with comprehensive preparatory materials, institutions can enhance their readiness and confidence, ensuring more impactful IPE sessions.

Motivational factors also emerged as a key theme in this study. As Sinclair (2008) noted, motivation plays a critical role in education, influencing why individuals choose to teach and how engaged they are with their students. Many facilitators expressed strong motivation and a willingness to volunteer again, driven by their belief in the value of interprofessional education and their positive experiences. Student engagement was a powerful motivator, inspiring facilitators to become more involved. This reciprocal cycle of enthusiasm between students and facilitators created an engaging atmosphere, enhancing the overall impact of the IPE event. Institutions could sustain facilitator motivation by recognizing contributions, fostering peer support, and providing opportunities for reflection.

The communication tools and techniques employed by facilitators further detailing the importance of empathy and inclusivity in optimizing student engagement. Strategies such as prompts, supportive language, and empathy-centered discussions encouraged active learning and created a dynamic, interactive environment. Facilitators emphasized the value of validating contributions and developing open dialogue, which allowed students to learn from diverse perspectives. By incorporating these tools into facilitator training, institutions can further enhance engagement and collaborative learning.

Participants highlighted that their role was less about providing answers and more about guiding students to explore, take risks, and learn deeply (King et al., 2020). They identified strategies such as creating a supportive environment where students felt comfortable speaking up, which helped boost motivation, critical thinking, and communication skills. Facilitators also noted that these strategies encouraged students to develop key professional attributes, including empathy, cultural awareness, and professionalism. In summary, this study offers actionable insights into structuring facilitator training programs that enhances preparedness, fosters motivation, and optimizes student engagement. These findings provide institutions with practical approaches to supporting facilitators, ultimately improving the quality and effectiveness of interprofessional education.

5. Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, the interviews occurred several months after the IPE event, which may have affected facilitators' recollection of their experiences. Additionally, different faculty conducted each interview, which could have introduced slight variations in the data collection process. Finally, the sample size was relatively small, with only seven out of 15 facilitators participating, potentially limiting the diversity of perspectives. Despite these limitations, the study offers valuable insights into the role of facilitators in IPE. Ensuring facilitators receive adequate preparation, motivation, and support could significantly enhance the overall IPE experience for all participants.

6. Conclusion

Through interactive discussions and probing inquiries, the paper sought to uncover the underlying factors that influence facilitator readiness and motivation, as well as the tools needed to optimize student engagement. Engaging facilitators in a collaborative setting is anticipated to provide valuable insights into the challenges they face, the resources they find

most effective, and the motivation needed to keep them committed to guiding students in these IPE settings. Findings show that when facilitators are well-guided and prepared, this leads to a positive outcome for the interprofessional education event. Looking ahead, future research could look at how facilitators' experiences and reactions vary between online and in-person IPE events, which would be especially useful as these educational formats continue to evolve.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Informed consent

Obtained.

Ethics approval

The Publication Ethics Committee of the Redfame Publishing.

The journal's policies adhere to the Core Practices established by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

Provenance and peer review

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Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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