

Sandra Goldsworthy¹, Margaret Verkuyl; ¹Mount Royal University, Calgary, Canada

Correspondence: sgoldsworthy@mtroyal.ca
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Introduction: While much is known about students' experiences and outcomes with virtual simulation (VS), little is known about the skills required to conduct the complex activity of facilitating simulation in the virtual environment [1], nor the needs and experiences of facilitators. A successful experience goes far beyond simply offering learners' access to a VS; it requires a facilitator who understands the learners' needs and course objectives, can create a welcoming virtual space that promotes learning, and can evaluate the experience. Currently, there is a gap in our understanding of the best ways to facilitate the different modalities used in VS and what skills, professional development, experience, and supports facilitators need.

Research Questions:

- 1) How well prepared were facilitators in the Virtu-WIL project, i.e., what were the facilitators' perceptions of their training needs and what recommendations did they have for training?
- 2) From a student and a facilitator perspective, what was the impact of the VS on student learning?
- 3) What impact did the VS have on students' readiness for the clinical setting/workplace and what factors contributed to that impact?

Methods: An exploratory qualitative research process was conducted to explore simulation facilitators' experiences with the virtual simulations using individual interviews. In addition, we used focus groups to assess the impact on students. A facilitator or student interview guide was used by the researchers. Data were analysed by the authors using a thematic content analysis [2].

Results: Ten facilitators from six educational institutions participated in the study: three from nursing, three from medical laboratory technology and four from paramedicine. Twenty-one students from five institutions participated: 8 from paramedicine and 13 from nursing. Some facilitators had previous simulation training and experience while others had no prior simulation experience. Two major themes were identified: The Facilitator Experience and VS: Impact on Learning. Facilitators and students were clear: to be effective, VSs need to align with course learning objectives, meet learner needs, and be skilfully facilitated. Effective facilitation had a positive impact on student outcomes.

Discussion: We learned the importance of a skilled facilitator in all stages of simulation pedagogy. The facilitator plays a vital role and it is not sufficient to be trained in in-person simulation, facilitators need training in the nuances of VS. Our study highlights the complexity of the facilitator role in which they have to use their knowledge and skills to create a safe, stimulating learning environment to enhance the learning environment.

Ethics statement: Authors confirm that all relevant ethical standards for research conduct and dissemination have been met. The submitting author confirms that relevant ethical approval was granted, if applicable.

ORIGINAL RESEARCH

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SIMULATION FACILITATOR SURVEY RESULTS FROM A PAN-CANADIAN VIRTUAL SIMULATION PROGRAM

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