



Embodying the Other, Preparing the Self: Impersonation Technique as Simulation-Based Pedagogy for Communicative Skill Development and Workforce Readiness

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the use of impersonation technique to enhance ten communicative skills essential for workforce readiness: active listening, confidence, appropriate method selection, tone and volume control, empathy, friendliness, respect, feedback-sharing, non-verbal cue interpretation, and responsiveness. Employing a mixed methods design within a four-day intensive workshop, quantitative data were collected from 77 performer-participants (actors, actresses, directors) via structured questionnaires, while qualitative insights were obtained through an interview with an expert drama practitioner. The findings revealed that 92.72% of respondents reported experiencing the target skills during the preparation and performance phases, and 95.58% perceived these skills as beneficial for their future careers. Notably, a gap emerged between the experience (87%) and perceived utility (94.8%) of non-verbal cues and responsiveness, interpreted through the lens of tacit knowledge-learners enacted these skills without full conscious awareness. The expert interview further illuminated the phase-specific nature of skill development, identifying respect and feedback-sharing as dominant during collaborative preparation, confidence and non-verbal reading as prominent on stage, and vocal modulation and active listening as operating across both phases. The study concludes that impersonation technique functions as a form of simulation-based and transformative learning, cultivating regulative skills during preparation and expressive skills during performance. This positions impersonation as a promising and adaptable pedagogy for bridging the soft skills gap in higher education, though longitudinal research on actual skill transfer to workplace contexts remains a priority for future investigation.

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INTRODUCTION

Drama has long been acknowledged not merely as a form of entertainment but as a potent pedagogical instrument for cultivating personal

growth, emotional intelligence, and social competence (Langley, 2006; Schubert, 2023). In recent years, such drama-based approaches encompassing process drama, applied drama, and creative drama have gained considerable ground in higher education, emphasizing embodied, experiential learning through role-taking, improvisation, and reflective dialogue (Österlind & Hallgren, 2025; Turkan, 2025). A growing body of evidence confirms that these methods enhance a range of transferable skills, including communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and empathy (Luo et al., 2024; Murray et al., 2025).

The relevance of these skills has become particularly urgent in the context of contemporary workforce demands. Employers across sectors consistently report a pervasive "soft skills gap," wherein graduates possess adequate technical knowledge yet lack the interpersonal and communicative competencies required for effective workplace performance (Braun et al., 2024; Ingsih & Suhana, 2023). In Indonesia, this misalignment between educational outcomes and industry needs has been widely documented, with communication, teamwork, and adaptability identified as critical yet underdeveloped competencies among university graduates (Ardhana et al., 2025; Aprilita & Pritasari, 2024; Gayatri et al., 2023). This situation underscores the necessity for pedagogical innovations that explicitly target the development of market-relevant communicative skills within tertiary curricula.

One promising but underexplored strategy within drama education is impersonation technique, which requires the actor to go beyond superficial mimicry and deeply embody the psychological and behavioural traits of another persona, thereby engaging substantial cognitive and affective resources (Barnych & Rozhko, 2020). Rooted in Stanislavski's (1936) principle of "living the part" and Meisner's emphasis on the "reality of doing" (Meisner & Longwell, 1987), impersonation demands that performers authentically recreate a character's emotional state, vocal modulation, and non-verbal communication. Consequently, the impersonation process can be understood as a form of simulation-based learning, analogous to the role-play and scenario-based training widely employed in professional fields such as healthcare, business, and teacher education to build practical competence in low-risk environments (Alharbi et al., 2024; Dai & Ke, 2022; O'Grady et al., 2021). For the present study, we adopt a concrete and actionable taxonomy of ten communicative skills derived from professional practice: active listening, confidence, appropriate method selection, tone and volume control, empathy, friendliness, respect, feedback-sharing, responsiveness, and non-verbal cue interpretation (Northup, 2023). This framework provides a targeted lens for assessing the transfer potential of drama-based training to job-market contexts.

Despite the intuitive alignment between impersonation and communication skill development, empirical research directly examining this connection remains notably scarce. Prior studies have primarily concentrated on general speaking proficiency (Nurzaita, 2020; Luo et al., 2024) or on student engagement and motivation (Li & Wang, 2026; Robson et al., 2024), often treating communication as a monolithic, language-focused construct rather than a multifaceted set of interdependent workplace skills (Mufidah et al., 2026; Putri et al., 2025; Roza et al., 2025). We contend that impersonation, with its characteristic dual-phase structure comprising collaborative preparation and on-stage performance uniquely cultivates both regulative skills (e.g., negotiation, feedback-sharing, respect) during rehearsals and expressive skills (e.g., vocal projection, confidence, non-verbal reading) during live execution. This phase-specific developmental dynamic has not been systematically investigated. Furthermore, we hypothesize that participants may enact certain competencies, particularly non-verbal attunement, implicitly rather than consciously, reflecting the operation of tacit knowledge (Johannessen, 2022). This tacit dimension may explain potential discrepancies between participants' conscious experience of a skill and their perceived future utility of that skill. To address the identified research gap, the present study investigates the extent to which impersonation technique, as practiced within a four-day drama workshop, contributes to the enhancement of the ten targeted communicative skills.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study was conducted within the context of a four-day intensive drama workshop titled Enhancing Acting and Directing Skills to Reflect the 4Cs of the 21st Century for Professional Communities in Malang Raya, held in the Malang Raya region. Short-term immersive interventions of this nature have been shown to produce meaningful shifts in participant awareness and skill development, particularly when the learning environment is highly experiential and contextually relevant (Hur et al., 2024; Lou, 2025).

Employing a mixed methods research design (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), this study integrated quantitative and qualitative primary data collection and analysis to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research problem. This approach is particularly well-suited to drama education research, where the embodied and often tacit nature of learning necessitates both numerical measurement of participant perceptions and interpretive exploration of lived experience (Duffy, 2022). Specifically, quantitative questionnaire data were used to measure the frequency and extent of participants' self-reported

engagement with the ten target communicative skills (addressing RQ1 and RQ2), while qualitative interview data were used to contextualize and interpret these findings through the lens of an expert practitioner (addressing RQ3).

From the larger workshop cohort of over 200 participants, 82 individuals were directly involved in the creative production of stage performances as actors, actresses, or directors. These creative performers constituted the target population for this study, as they engaged most intensively with the impersonation technique across both preparation (off-stage) and performance (on-stage) phases. Supporting crew members (costume, lighting, make-up, stage management) were excluded because their roles did not require the same depth of character impersonation and embodied communicative practice. Of the 82 creative performers invited, 77 completed and returned the questionnaire, yielding a response rate of 93.9%.

The research process employed two primary data collection techniques. First, a structured questionnaire was designed to capture two dimensions of participant experience corresponding to RQ1 and RQ2: whether participants experienced each of the ten communicative skills during the workshop activities, and whether they perceived each skill as beneficial for their future workforce readiness. The ten skills active listening, confidence, appropriate choice of communication method, setting volume and tone, empathy, friendliness, respect, feedback-sharing, non-verbal cue interpretation, and responsiveness were derived from Northup's (2023) industry-oriented framework. The skills were paired arbitrarily in the questionnaire items to avoid implying any hierarchical ordering of importance. Responses were recorded using a binary "Yes/No" format to simplify analysis and minimize participant burden, a practical consideration in arts-based research settings where time and attention are often limited (Morris & Paris, 2022). The questionnaire was distributed electronically via a dedicated WhatsApp group created for workshop participants, ensuring controlled communication and facilitating timely responses. Data were collected within one week following the conclusion of the workshop to capture participant reflections while the experience remained salient.

Second, a semi-structured interview guide was prepared for the expert interview, allowing for flexibility to pursue emergent themes while ensuring core topics were addressed (Archibald et al., 2024). Questions explored the expert's understanding of impersonation technique, its relevance to communicative skill development, and his observations regarding which skills emerge during preparation versus performance phases. An interview was conducted with Mr. Abdul Mukhid, a dramatist with over two decades of field

experience in acting, directing, and drama education. The interview was conducted via WhatsApp voice messages on September 13, 2024. The expert was provided with the interview guide in advance and responded to each question with detailed voice recordings, which were subsequently transcribed for analysis. Expert interviews are a recognized method in qualitative research for obtaining insider perspectives that enrich and triangulate quantitative findings (Lehikoinen & Tuittila, 2024).

Data analysis proceeded in three integrated stages. For the quantitative strand, questionnaire responses were tabulated using Microsoft Excel, with frequencies and percentages calculated for each pair of communicative skills, both for the "experience" dimension (RQ1) and the "perceived utility" dimension (RQ2). Descriptive statistics were deemed appropriate given the exploratory nature of the study and the sample size ($n = 77$). For the qualitative strand, the expert interview transcript was analyzed using thematic analysis, a flexible yet rigorous method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within qualitative data. A key analytical lens was the concept of tacit knowledge the understanding that individuals often "know more than they can tell" (Johannessen, 2022; Mitchell et al., 2022). This framework was used to interpret the discrepancy observed between participants' reported experience of certain skills and their perception of those skills' utility. Finally, both quantitative and qualitative data were integrated during the interpretation phase, with the expert's commentary used to provide explanatory depth for the numerical patterns observed in the questionnaire data a strategy consistent with the explanatory sequential design within mixed methods research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

This research was conducted in accordance with the ethical considerations upheld by the institution. All participants were informed of the research purpose and provided their consent for data collection. Participation in the questionnaire was voluntary, and responses were anonymized prior to analysis. The expert interviewee consented to the use of his name and professional insights in the publication of this research.

RESULTS

Response Rate and Sample Characteristics

Of the 82 creative performers (actors, actresses, and directors) who participated in the workshop, 77 completed and returned the questionnaire, yielding a response rate of 93.9%.

RQ1: Participant Experience of Communicative Skills During Impersonation

The first research question asked to what extent participants reported experiencing the ten target communicative skills during the preparation and on-stage performance phases of the impersonation technique. Participants were presented with five pairs of skills and asked whether they engaged with these skills during the workshop activities.

For the first pair, active listening and confidence, 70 out of 77 respondents (90.9%) reported experiencing these skills during the workshop activities as shown in Figure 1.

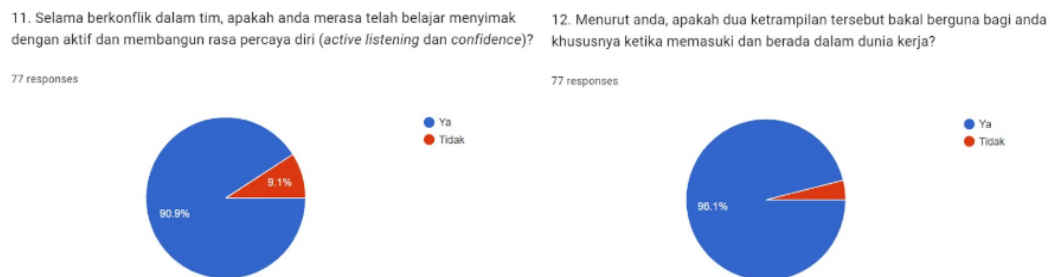


Figure 1 Active listening and confidence

For the second pair, choice of communication method and setting volume/tone, Figure 2 shows that 73 out of 77 respondents (94.8%) reported experiencing these skills.

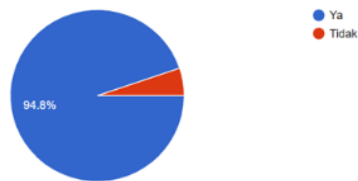


Figure 2. Proper choice of communicating and setting volume and tone

For the third skill-pair, empathy and friendliness, 73 respondents (94.8%) reported experiencing these skills as seen in Figure 3.

15. Selama berkonflik dalam tim, apakah anda merasa telah belajar membangun empati dan bersikap bersahabat (*empathy dan friendliness*)? 16. Menurut anda, apakah dua ketrampilan tersebut bakal berguna bagi anda khususnya ketika memasuki dan berada dalam dunia kerja?

77 responses



77 responses

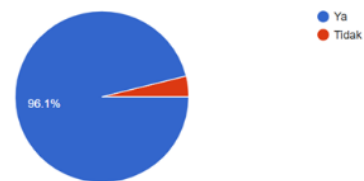
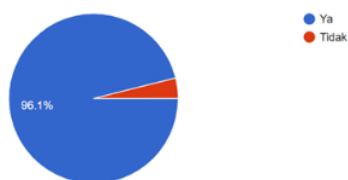


Figure 3. Empathy and friendliness

For the fourth pair, respect and feedback-sharing, 74 respondents (96.1%) indicated that they experienced giving respect and engaging in feedback-sharing. This was the highest reported experience among all five skill pairs as Figure 4 shows.

17. Selama berkonflik dalam tim, apakah anda merasa telah belajar cara membangun respek dan cara berbagi masukan (*respect dan feedback-sharing*)?

77 responses



18. Menurut anda, apakah dua ketrampilan tersebut bakal berguna bagi anda khususnya ketika memasuki dan berada dalam dunia kerja?

77 responses

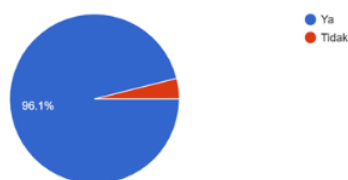


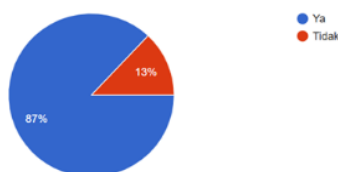
Figure 4. Showing respect and sharing feedback

For the last skill-pair, non-verbal cues and responsiveness, 67 respondents (87.0%) reported experiencing the skills of interpreting non-verbal cues and demonstrating responsiveness. As can be seen in Figure 5, this figure was notably lower than the preceding pairs.

19. Selama berkonflik dalam tim, apakah anda merasa telah belajar menangkap isyarat non-verbal serta cara bersikap responsif (*non-verbal cues dan responsiveness*)?

Catatan: isyarat non-verbal termasuk perubahan raut wajah, gerak (anggota) badan, dan sejenisnya.

77 responses



20. Menurut anda, apakah dua ketrampilan tersebut bakal berguna bagi anda khususnya ketika memasuki dan berada dalam dunia kerja?

77 responses

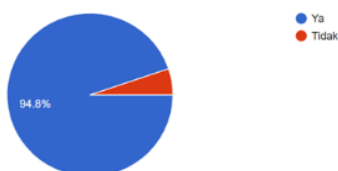


Figure 5. Non-verbal cues and responsiveness

Table 1 consolidates the quantitative results across all five skill pairs. The mean number of respondents reporting skill experience was 71.4 out of 77, corresponding to an average affirmative response rate of 92.72%.

Table 1.
The Questionnaires' Finding from 77 Respondents

Pairs of communicative skills	Respondents positively experiencing the skills		Respondents positively perceiving the utility of the skills	
	Σ of 77	%	Σ of 77	%
Active listening and confidence	70	90.9	74	96.1
proper choice of communicative method and setting volume and tone	73	94.8	73	94.8
empathy and friendliness	73	94.8	74	96.1
respect and feedback-sharing	74	96.1	74	96.1
non-verbal cues and responsiveness	67	87	73	94.8
Means	71.4	92.72	73.6	95.58

RQ2: Perceived Utility of Communicative Skills for Future Workforce Readiness

The second research question examined participants' perceptions of whether the ten communicative skills would be beneficial in their future career contexts. The right-hand columns of Table 1 display these findings.

Across all five skill pairs, the average number of respondents affirming future utility was 73.6 out of 77, representing a mean rate of 95.58%. For every skill pair except choice of communication method and setting volume/tone, the percentage of respondents perceiving future utility equaled or exceeded the percentage reporting actual experience during the workshop. For non-verbal cues and responsiveness, 87.0% reported experience while 94.8% acknowledged future utility, yielding a gap of 7.8 percentage points.

RQ3: Expert Practitioner Interpretation of Impersonation and Communicative Skill Development

To address the third research question, an interview was conducted with Mr. Abdul Mukhid, a drama practitioner with over twenty years of experience.

The expert confirmed that impersonation is a highly useful technique for communicative skill development. He stated that impersonation "allows actors to delve into other personalities," and that this "mimicking process" trains performers to understand and subsequently deal with diverse character types. He further emphasized that this training constitutes a practical simulation for future careers, wherein graduates will inevitably encounter a wide range of personalities in real job situations.

Regarding phase-specificity of communicative skills, the expert noted that certain skills are more dominant during the preparation phase, such as respect and feedback-sharing, as actors must negotiate interpretations, accept criticism, and collaboratively refine their portrayals. In contrast, other skills become prominent during the on-stage performance phase, including confidence and the reading of non-verbal cues, which are essential for real-time interaction and audience engagement. He additionally observed that some skills—such as setting appropriate volume and tone, and active listening—are actively employed across both phases of the dramatic process.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide empirical support for the proposition that impersonation technique, as practised within a drama workshop context, facilitates the development and recognition of communicative skills relevant to workforce readiness. However, beyond simply confirming this relationship, the integration of quantitative and qualitative data interpreted through theoretical lenses from drama pedagogy, cognitive science, and transformative learning reveals a more nuanced understanding of how and why impersonation functions as an effective pedagogical strategy.

The Phase Shift (Preparation, Performance, and Dual Function of Impersonation)

The expert's observation that certain skills dominate during preparation (respect, feedback-sharing) while others peak during performance (confidence, non-verbal cue reading) aligns with Barnych and Rozhko's (2020) conceptualisation of the impersonation process as comprising two distinct creative stages. However, the present data extend this framework by demonstrating that these stages cultivate qualitatively different categories of communicative competence. During the preparation phase, the high reported

experience of respect and feedback-sharing (96.1%) suggests that impersonation serves a regulative function. The collaborative rehearsal process necessitates that participants negotiate character interpretations, offer and receive constructive criticism, and subordinate individual preferences to the coherence of the ensemble. This mirrors the dynamics of professional teamwork, where navigating divergent opinions and integrating feedback are essential to project success (Pratama, 2025). The Mantle of the Expert approach, a related drama-based pedagogy, similarly emphasises that the collaborative build-up to the performance is where social and cooperative skills are forged (Özdemir & Erdogan, 2025; Bleaken & Aitken, 2022).

Conversely, the performance phase cultivates an expressive function. The high reported experience of confidence (90.9%) and the acknowledged importance of non-verbal cues (94.8% utility) reflect the demands of embodied communication. When an actor steps onto the stage in character, they must project their voice, manage physical presence, and respond authentically to the dynamic cues of fellow performers. This is precisely the kind of high-stakes, real-time communication required in professional presentations, client negotiations, or stakeholder meetings (Johnston & Campbell, 2025). Thus, impersonation provides a scaffolded simulation (cf. Alharbi et al., 2024) where learners can practise both the internal team dynamics and the external-facing expressive demands of professional life. Previous studies on drama-based pedagogy have largely treated communication as a unified construct (Nurzaita, 2020; Luo et al., 2024), whereas the present findings demonstrate that different phases of dramatic practice activate different skill clusters a distinction that has not been systematically documented in the existing literature.

Tacit Dimension And the Non-Verbal Cue Discrepancy

One of the most analytically significant findings is the 7.8 percentage point gap between the experience (87.0%) and perceived utility (94.8%) of non-verbal cues and responsiveness. Rather than viewing this as a weakness of the workshop, we interpret this through the framework of tacit knowledge (Johannessen, 2022; Mitchell et al., 2022). Polanyi's dictum that "we can know more than we can tell" (Polanyi, 1983, as cited in Johannessen, 2022) aptly describes the phenomenon observed here.

During impersonation, actors continuously decode and encode non-verbal signals a furrowed brow, a shift in posture, a pregnant pause to maintain the believability of the scene. This is the essence of Stanislavski's concept of communion ("obshcheniye"), a mindful, embodied awareness of the connection between performers (Sowerby, 2025; Merlin, 2023). Yet, this process often occurs below the threshold of conscious articulation, especially for novice

performers. Participants may successfully respond to a partner's non-verbal cue (demonstrating the skill) without being able to explicitly state, "I just engaged in non-verbal cue interpretation." This tacit knowledge gap has not been previously documented in drama-based communication training research, representing a novel contribution of the present study.

The higher utility score (94.8%) reveals that participants possess an intuitive, pre-reflective understanding that "reading the room" is essential in professional settings (Keelson et al., 2024). The impersonation workshop provided an embodied experience that planted this awareness, even if the cognitive articulation lagged behind. This finding underscores the unique contribution of arts-based and simulation-based pedagogies: they build competence through doing, creating a reservoir of embodied experience that can later be formalised through reflection (Wells et al., 2023). While prior simulation-based studies in fields such as nursing and business have documented tacit learning in clinical or managerial contexts (Alharbi et al., 2024; O'Grady et al., 2021), the present study extends this insight to drama-based communication pedagogy, demonstrating that non-verbal competence can be enacted without full conscious recognition a finding with significant implications for curriculum design.

The lower reported experience of non-verbal cues may also be partially attributable to cognitive load (Wu et al., 2022; Eftanastarini & Anggraini, 2026; Thohir et al., 2026)). For novice performers, the primary cognitive demand is often remembering lines, hitting marks, and managing vocal projection. The conscious processing required for these foundational tasks can temporarily suppress awareness of more subtle, parallel processes like non-verbal attunement. This does not mean the attunement is absent; rather, it is relegated to the periphery of conscious attention. As performers gain fluency, the cognitive load of basic tasks decreases, freeing up mental resources for deeper interpersonal connection and nuanced non-verbal communication. Future iterations of impersonation-based training might benefit from explicit post-performance debriefing sessions that help learners bring this tacit, embodied knowledge into explicit awareness (cf. transformative learning strategies, Javed, 2023).

Transformative Learning (From Impersonating Other to Transforming Self)

The near-unanimous perception that the communicative skills would be useful in future careers (mean 95.58%) suggests that participants experienced the workshop as more than a technical exercise; they perceived it as personally and professionally transformative. This aligns with Mezirow's transformative learning theory, which posits that significant learning occurs when individuals

critically reflect on their experiences and revise their frames of reference (Billings-Padiachey & Motsisi, 2023; Saputro, 2025). The present study provides empirical evidence that impersonation can catalyse such transformation in a relatively short, intensive format.

Impersonation, by its very nature, demands that the performer temporarily suspend their own identity and inhabit the perspective of another. This act of "perspective-taking" is a powerful mechanism for developing empathy a skill that 94.8% of participants reported experiencing and 96.1% deemed useful. By embodying a character with motivations, fears, and desires different from their own, participants engage in a form of deep, experiential empathy that transcends abstract discussion (Kanatelia, 2023; Dudar, 2024). This finding resonates with research on psychodrama and creative arts interventions, which consistently demonstrate gains in cognitive and affective empathy following embodied role-play (Şermet et al., 2026; Morizio et al., 2024). However, prior studies have largely focused on clinical or therapeutic populations (Morizio et al., 2024; Şermet et al., 2026); the present study extends these findings to the domain of workforce readiness, demonstrating that empathy developed through impersonation is perceived as directly relevant to professional careers.

The high endorsement of confidence (96.1% perceived utility) can similarly be understood through a transformative lens. Successfully performing a character in front of an audience managing anxiety, recovering from mistakes, and receiving applause provides a powerful mastery experience. This embodied success challenges pre-existing self-concepts of limitation and builds a durable sense of self-efficacy that transfers to other performance-oriented contexts, such as job interviews, presentations, and professional networking. Previous research on drama education has documented confidence gains in classroom settings (Turkan, 2025; Prueksapitak et al., 2025), but the present study provides quantitative evidence of the magnitude of this effect (90.9% experience, 96.1% utility) and links it explicitly to future workforce readiness a connection that prior studies have not systematically established.

Connecting to 4Cs of the 21st Century Skill-Framework

The findings must be situated within the broader educational imperative of developing 21st Century Skills, often summarised as the 4Cs: Critical Thinking, Creativity, Communication, and Collaboration. The present study focused specifically on the Communication pillar, and the results clearly demonstrate that impersonation technique is an effective vehicle for enhancing a broad spectrum of communicative sub-skills. However, the data also suggest significant contributions to the Collaboration pillar. The high frequency of

reported feedback-sharing and respect (96.1%) indicates that the workshop environment provided a structured, low-stakes context for navigating interpersonal tensions a crucial workplace competency (Braun et al., 2024; Ingsih & Suhana, 2023). By engaging learners in the co-creation of a dramatic reality, impersonation pedagogy addresses multiple dimensions of the 4Cs framework simultaneously, making it a highly efficient and holistic educational strategy. This multi-dimensional impact distinguishes impersonation from more conventional communication training methods, which often target individual skills in isolation (Nelson et al., 2026; Axiak, 2025).

CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine the extent to which impersonation technique, as implemented within a four-day drama workshop, contributes to the development of communicative skills relevant to workforce readiness. Addressing RQ1, the quantitative data revealed that a substantial majority of participants (mean 92.72%) reported experiencing the ten target communicative skills including active listening, confidence, empathy, respect, and non-verbal cue interpretation during the preparation and performance phases of impersonation. Addressing RQ2, an even higher proportion of participants (mean 95.58%) perceived these skills as beneficial for their future professional careers. The qualitative expert interview (RQ3) confirmed that impersonation functions as a practical simulation of real-world interpersonal encounters and that specific skills manifest differentially across the preparation and performance phases. The phase-based analysis distinguished between regulative functions of preparation (respect, feedback-sharing) and expressive functions of performance (confidence, non-verbal reading), offering a novel contribution to the literature on drama-based pedagogy.

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