**Measuring transfer from first-year Communication Skills courses:**

**A longitudinal mixed-methods study at the University of Dar es Salaam**

***Institutional Description***

The **University of Dar es Salaam** (UDSM) was established in 1961, making it the oldest public university in Tanzania. In 2022, UDSM had a total enrolment of 39,034 registered students. Approximately 14,000 new students register at the university each year enrolling in one of the 393 different undergraduate and postgraduate programs currently on offer.

The vast majority of UDSM students speak English as a third language (after their mother tongue and Swahili). The language of instruction in pre-primary and primary school is Swahili, but switches to English at the secondary and tertiary levels. While there is considerable debate about whether instruction throughout the educational system should be in English or Swahili, UDSM requires students in its Humanities, Social Sciences, and Engineering programs to take and pass Communication Skills courses to help them develop the skills they will need to be successful in their university courses. These courses are very large (classes of over 500) and instructors do not have the resources to assign and grade very much writing. Current stakeholders at UDSM are divided about the value of these courses and whether students transfer the skills and knowledge they acquire in them to other courses and contexts. To date, no study of writing transfer has been conducted at the university or anywhere in East Africa where English is typically students third language.

The **University of Toronto Mississauga** is a primarily undergraduate suburban campus of the University of Toronto with a total enrolment of 15,000 students. Its first-year class is typically around 4,000 students, and over 25% of each cohort speaks English as an additional language. In 2020, UTM created the Institute for the Study of University Pedagogy (ISUP) and launched the university’s first mandatory first-year composition course, ISP100: Writing for University and Beyond. ISUP is responsibility for the design, delivery, and assessment of this new course. ISP100 is currently a requirement for approximately half of its students; within the next five years, it will be required for all first-year students. Faculty are currently developing strategies for measuring writing transfer and assessing the impact of this new initiative.

***Key Theorists***

The key theorists informing our work include the early and current writing studies scholars who have done work on “writing transfer.” So, the work of Beaufort, Bergmann & Zepernick, Moore, Walvoord & McCarthy, and Wolfe & Wilder are particularly important.

More general research on “knowledge transfer” more broadly is also foundational to our approach. Here, research by Beach, Bereiter, Brent, and Tuomi-Grohn & Engestrom is important. A full bibliography from our more extensive literature review is below.

Beach, King. (2003). Consequential transitions: A developmental view of knowledge propagation through social organizations. In T. Tuomi-Grohn & Y. Engestrom (Eds.), *Between School and Work: New Perspectives on Transfer and Boundary-Crossing*. (pp. 39-61). Pergamon.

Beaufort, A. (2007). *College Writing and Beyond: A New Framework for University Writing Instruction*. Utah State University Press.

Bereiter, Carl. (1995). A Dispositional View of Transfer. In A. McKeough, J. Lupart, & A. Marini (Eds.), *Teaching for Transfer: Fostering Generalization in Learning*. (pp. 21-34). Lawrence Erlbaum.

Bergmann, L.S. & Zepernick, J. (2007). Disciplinarity and Transfer: Students’ Perceptions of Learning to Write. *WPA: Writing Program Administration, 31*(1-2): 124-49.

Brent, D. (2012). Crossing Boundaries: Co-Op Students Relearning to Write. *College Composition and Communication 63*(4): 558-92.

Connors, Robert. (1995). The New Abolitionism: Toward a Historical Background. In J. Petraglia (Ed.), *Reconceiving Writing, Rethinking Writing Instruction.* (pp. 3-26). Lawrence Erlbaum.

Crowley, Sharon. (1991). A Personal Essay on Freshman English. *Pretext 12*: 156-76.

Downs, D., & Wardle, E. (2007). Teaching about Writing, Righting Misconceptions: (Re)envisioning “First-Year Composition” as “Introduction to Writing Studies.” *College Composition and Communication*, *58*(4), 552–584. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20456966>

Elon Statement on Writing Transfer. (2015). Retrieved from <https://www.centerforengagedlearning.org/elon-statement-on-writing-transfer/>

Guile, D. & Young, M. (2003). Transfer and Transition in Vocational Education: Some Theoretical Consideration. In T. Tuomi-Grohn & Y. Engestrom (Eds.), *Between School and Work: New Perspectives on Transfer and Boundary-Crossing*. (pp. 63-81). Pergamon.

Herrington, A. J. (1985). Writing in Academic Settings: A Study of the Contexts for Writing in Two College Chemical Engineering Courses. *Research in the Teaching of English, 19*(4): 331-59.

Joliffe, David. (1995). Discourse, Interdiscursivity, and Composition Instruction. In In J. Petraglia (Ed.), *Reconceiving Writing, Rethinking Writing Instruction.* (pp. 197-216). Lawrence Erlbaum.

Judd, C. H. (1939). *Educational Psychology*. Houghton.

Kaufer, D. & Young, R. (1993). Writing in the content areas: Some theoretical complexities. In L. Odell (Ed.), T*heory and Practice in the Teaching of Writing: Rethinking the Discipline*. (pp. 71-104). Southern Illinois University Press.

Kitzhaber, A. (1963). *Themes, Theories, and Therapies: Teaching of Writing in College*. McGraw-Hill.

McCarthy, L. P. (1987). A stranger in strange lands: A college student writing across the curriculum. *Research in the Teaching of English*, *21*(3), 233-265. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40171114>

Moore, J. (2012). Mapping the question: The state of writing-related transfer research. *Composition Forum, 26*.

Petraglia, J. (1995). Introduction: General Writing Skills Instruction and Its Discontents. In J. Petraglia (Ed.), *Reconceiving Writing, Rethinking Writing Instruction.* (pp. xi-xvii). Lawrence Erlbaum.

Russell, David. (1995). Activity Theory and Its Implications for Writing Instruction. In J. Petraglia (Ed.), *Reconceiving Writing, Rethinking Writing Instruction.* (pp. 51-78). Lawrence Erlbaum.

Tuomi-Grohn, T. & Engestrom, Y. (2003). Conceptualizing transfer: From standard notions to developmental perspectives. In T. Tuomi-Grohn & Y. Engestrom (Eds.), *Between School and Work: New Perspectives on Transfer and Boundary-Crossing*. (pp. 19-38). Pergamon.

Walvoord, B. & McCarthy, L. (1990). *Thinking and writing in college: A naturalistic study of students in four discipline*s. NCTE.

Wardle, E. (2007). Understanding ‘transfer’ from FYC: Preliminary results of a longitudinal study. WP*A: Writing Program Administration, 31*(1-2): 65-85.

Wolfe, J., Olson, B. & Wilder, L. (2014). Knowing What We Know about Writing in the Disciplines: A New Approach to Teaching for Transfer in FYC. *The WAC Journal*, 25(1), 42–77. <https://doi.org/10.37514/WAC-J.2014.25.1.03>

***Glossary***

Writing transfer: “the phenomenon in which new and unfamiliar writing tasks are approached through the application, remixing, or integration of previous knowledge, skills, strategies, and dispositions.” (Elon Statement, 2015)

*Principal Investigators*

* Michael Karani, Centre for Communication Studies, University of Dar es Salaam
* Tyler Evans-Tokaryk, Institute for the Study of University Pedagogy, University of Toronto Mississauga

*Overview*

Writing transfer, defined as “the phenomenon in which new and unfamiliar writing tasks are approached through the application, remixing, or integration of previous knowledge, skills, strategies, and dispositions” (Elon Statement, 2015), has emerged as one of the most important areas of research in writing studies over the past 20 years. Indeed, it is difficult to overstate the importance of understanding how and why students are able (or not able) to transfer writing knowledge and practices among different contexts. Virtually all undergraduate students in the United States are required to take at least one first-year composition course that is explicitly designed to prepare them for the writing they will do in other courses. Elsewhere in the world, universities invest significant resources in Writing Across the Curriculum programs or in specific courses (e.g., Writing in the Disciplines, Communications, English for Academic Purposes, foundational academic skills, first-year seminars) that teach students the kind of writing they are expected to do in university. In most cases, these courses are program requirements that must be completed early in a students’ academic career. Clearly, the assumption informing all such initiatives is that students will transfer the knowledge and skills they acquire in one course to other courses and contexts. It is less clear, however, that this assumption is borne out by the evidence.

Early research on writing transfer produced decidedly disappointing results. Seminal studies by Herrington (1985) and McCarthy (1987) suggested that students did not transfer writing knowledge and skills from traditional first-year composition (FYC) classes to the writing they were doing for courses in other disciplines. Subsequent research by Beaufort (2007), Smit (2004), and Wardle (2007) confirmed these findings, but raised significant questions about what constituted “writing development” and how we ought to measure it. In a paper summarizing this discouraging body of research, Bergman & Zepernick (2007) famously concluded that “students metaphorically put what they’ve learned each semester in a box under the bed instead of trying to make connections and how things learned in previous classes apply in other situations” (p. 148). Many scholars since have been preoccupied with this box under the bed, exploring pedagogical strategies for improving the likelihood that students will transfer the writing skills and knowledge acquired in the first-year composition classroom to other contexts.

The research exploring strategies for preventing students from putting the writing knowledge and skills they learn in first-year composition or similar classes into a box under the bed is extensive, but the most relevant for our study focuses on the curriculum of the writing course (Connors, 1985; Kaufer & Young, 1994; and Downs & Wardle, 2007); alignment between assignments in the writing course and those in subsequent courses across the curriculum (Beaufort, 2007; Nelms & Dively, 2007); students’ attitudes towards writing and the writing course (Bergmann & Zepernick, 2007; Moore, 2012); and strategies for teaching for transfer (Yancey, Robertson, & Taczak, 2014; Downs & Wardle, 2007; Beaufort, 2007). Each of these areas of scholarship has yielded valuable insights into how academic writing courses can be designed to help students recognize opportunities for writing transfer in other courses.

Our study is most directly inspired by the influential work done at the Elon Research Seminar (ERS) on Critical Transitions: Writing and the Question of Transfer (2016), a two-year long initiative involving 45 writing studies scholars from 28 institutions in five different countries. Among its many scholarly activities, the ERS published a collection of authoritative essays along with the authoritative “Elon Statement on Writing Transfer” that offers a summary of the group’s discussion on writing and transfer. Providing a baseline for subsequent investigations of writing transfer, this document categorically states that “we know that writing transfer both occurs and is necessary for successful writing” but that “research highlights the challenges of teaching to facilitate transfer” (Moore & Anson, 2016, p. 7). Successful teaching for transfer must, for example, impact the dispositions of a wide variety of students, address the different prior knowledge with which students enter the writing classroom, and somehow align writing curricula with the writing done in other contexts.

While the past 40 years of writing transfer research has inspired some valuable rethinking of how academic writing is taught across the curriculum, none of it has been conducted in the African context, at an English-medium African university, with African students and instructors. Our research addresses this gap by adapting writing transfer theory and methods developed for the study of American writing programs to a comprehensive longitudinal study of students in a wide variety of disciplines taking mandatory Communication Skills courses at an African university.

Our research is being conducted at the University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM) in Tanzania. Like many African universities, UDSM is an English-medium school where many students speak English as a third language and did not attend English-medium schools prior to attending university. To help these students develop the skills they need for post-secondary studies, UDSM requires them to take a first-year communications course in the first year of their program. Approximately 4,000 humanities, social sciences, and education students are enrolled in CL106; 1,000 finance, marketing, and management students must complete CL108; and another 1,000 engineering students must take CL111. While significant resources are allocated to these mandatory service courses, nobody knows whether the students who take them acquire knowledge and skills that they then transfer to assignments they do in other courses or the work they do after graduation. Our research, therefore, will be valuable for the local stakeholders at UDSM as well as the broader writing studies community interested in the question of writing transfer.

*Research Questions*

The primary research question guiding our inquiry is as follows: *What skills and knowledge do students transfer from their first-year Communication Skills courses to other courses at UDSM?*

We are also addressing five research sub-questions:

1. What skills and knowledge do students perceive they learned in first-year Communication Skills courses?
2. What communication skills do students need and practice in non-Communication Skills courses at UDSM?
3. What specific communication skills and knowledge do students acquire in first-year Communication Skills and apply in other courses at UDSM and in the workforce after graduation?
4. How helpful do students find the skills and knowledge they learned in first-year Communication Skills courses when completing assignments and tests in other courses at UDSM and when completing communication tasks in the workforce after graduation?
5. How well do first-year Communication Skills courses prepare students for the communications work they do in other courses at UDSM and in the workforce after graduation?

*Progress to Date*

This project was launched in January 2022. We have completed an extensive literature review, developed all of our data collection instruments (surveys and interview scripts), and recruiting materials, and secured research ethics approval from both institutions.

Some field work to set the project up was conducted in July 2022. Interviews were conducted with over 20 Communication Skills instructors and a rubric was designed to help with data analysis. The interviews provide us with baseline data regarding instructors’ perceptions of students’ abilities, the course, and the position of the course within the institution as a whole. The interviews also provide us with information regarding the instructors’ perceptions of the field of writing studies and communications skills instruction and “writing transfer” more broadly.

To date, 21 “content area” faculty members have agreed to support the project by participating in an interview and facilitating data collection (distribution of surveys and collection of writing samples) in their courses. Senior university administration is aware of the project and agreed to support and promote it, as necessary. Tyler Evans-Tokaryk secured a Research Associateship adjunct position at UDSM which will facilitate travel and other administrative details (visas, etc.) in the future. A formal Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the University of Toronto and the University of Dar es Salaam was signed in early 2022 and will extend for at least five years. We are in the process of applying for funding to support the project in future years.

In November we launched a pilot survey of the 3000 first-year students enrolled in two Communication Skills courses. We also began recruiting the students we will track for the next 4-5 years (interviewing them and collecting writing samples from them).

*Research Plan (Data Collection & Analysis)*

* We will invite all students in three first-year Communication courses (CL106, CL108, and CL111) to complete a number of surveys while they are at UDSM: 1) a pre-survey in the first three weeks of their first-year CL course (a pilot version of this was launched in November 2022); 2) a survey at the end of their first year of university; 3) a survey at the end of their second year; 4) a survey at the end of their third year; 5) a survey at the end of their fourth year (for Engineering students who took CL111 only); 6) a survey after they have been out of university for a year. The purpose of these surveys is to track specific cohorts of students' development as writers; the surveys are customized for students in each of the three courses.
* We will also recruit between three and five students from each of the first-year Communication Skills courses to conduct interviews at the end of each academic year and to share samples of the writing they did each year. These students will be the focus of our research for the duration of the project.
* We have already interviewed the instructors of the three Communication Skills courses before they teach in 2022; we will also interview them at the end of the 2022/2023 academic year.
* We will interview the instructors of a number of content-area (i.e., non-Communication) courses at the end of each academic year. We have targeted 21 courses that will see many of the students we are tracking over the lifetime of the project.
* Data analysis will begin as soon as each set of data has been collected. For example, a thematic analysis of the Communication instructor “Expectation” interviews will begin in September; analysis of the student pre-surveys will begin November 2022; analysis of other student surveys will begin in June 2023; analysis of Communication and content-area instructor post-interviews will begin in June 2023 as well; analysis of student writing samples will begin in February 2023 and continue through the academic year.
* This process will repeat annually for the next 4-5 years.

*Why are We Doing This?*

To date, no research has been conducted on writing transfer at any English-medium university in Africa. Our proposed research addresses this gap by adapting writing transfer theory and methods developed for the study of American writing programs to a comprehensive longitudinal study of over 6,000 students from different fields of study at UDSM. Data collection techniques include a pre-survey, post-surveys, students’ assignments and annual interviews for few selected students from each course. CL course instructors and content course instructors will also be interviewed. This research will enhance our theoretical understanding of how writing transfer at the post-secondary level operates; will help ensure that a first-year communication skills program is inclusive and accessible to an entire population of undergraduate students; and will help determine whether the current CL courses are achieving their desired objectives.

*Rationale for International Collaboration*

* Creates dialogue between different parts of the world, expanding our understanding of writing instruction and transfer
* Uses data from East Africa to “test” American theories of writing transfer
* Applies American theories of writing transfer to very different context (students from different culture, with different language histories, from different educational systems)
* Results should provide valuable insights into international discussions of how to teach academic writing
* Results may challenge established understandings of writing transfer

**Data Collection Instruments**

Below are samples of the pre- and post-surveys and interview protocols (for instructors and students) we have devised for this research.

**Measuring transfer from first-year communication courses:**

**A longitudinal mixed-methods study at UDSM**

**Pre-Survey**

**CL106 Students Only**

**[survey done in class]**

Dear CL106 Student:

Researchers at the University of Dar es Salaam and the University of Toronto are conducting a study titled “Measuring transfer from first-year communication courses: A longitudinal mixed-methods study at UDSM.” The purpose of this research is to determine how much of the knowledge and skills students acquire in their first-year communication courses at UDSM is transferred to the work they do in other courses or contexts after graduation. We are also interested in knowing students’ perceptions of their communication skills, the communication work they do in their UDSM courses, and the kinds of communication skills they will need in the future.

We are inviting you to complete a survey that will provide us with information that is essential for our research. The survey has 49 questions and will take **less than 15 minutes** to complete.

**Please note: All CL106, CL108, and CL111 students who complete this survey will be entered into a raffle for a brand-new laptop computer (approximate value 800,000 TZS). The lucky winner will be contacted by email by November 30, 2022, so they can pick up their prize.**

You are free to decline to complete this survey. By completing the survey, you are providing your consent to participate in this research. All the information you provide will be kept completely confidential and all survey data will be anonymized before they are analyzed. None of the information collected in the survey will be shared outside the research team and no participants’ names will appear in any reports on this research.

The results of this research will be published in an academic journal and made public on the Centre for Communication Studies (University of Dar es Salaam) website as soon as they are available.

We hope that you take a few minutes of your time to complete this survey and make our research into this important issue possible. With your help, we can work to ensure that UDSM provides the best possible support for students who want to improve their communication skills.

Sincerely,

Dr. Michael Karani (Centre for Communication Studies, University of Dar es Salaam)

Prof. Tyler Evans-Tokaryk (Institute for the Study of University Pedagogy, University of Toronto)

**\*** **\*** **\***

1. Please provide your full name. [open field]
2. Please provide your UDSM student number. [open field]
3. Please provide your email address. [open field]
4. Please provide your mobile phone number. [open field]
5. What is your age? [16-24; 25-34; 35-44; over 50; prefer not to answer]
6. What is your marital status [single; married; divorced; separated; other; prefer not to answer]
7. Please provide your social media account(s), if you have any.

* Twitter: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* Facebook: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* Instagram: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* LinkedIn: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* TikTok: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* Pinterest: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* Other: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* Prefer not to share this information: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. What year of studies are you in? [First Year; Second Year; Third Year; Fourth Year]
2. What year did you enrol at UDSM? [open field]
3. Which of the following best describes how you identify in terms of gender? [male; female; non-binary; other; prefer not to answer]
4. Please tell us about the languages you speak.

* What is your first language? (e.g., Maasai, Swahili, English) [open field]
* What is your second language? [open field]
* What is your third language, if any? [open field]
* Please identify any additional vernacular or foreign languages that you speak. [open field]

1. What language do you usually speak when you are with friends? (e.g., Sukuma, Swahili, English) [open field]
2. What language do you usually speak at home? (e.g., Iraqw, Swahili, English) [open field]
3. What is your ethnic background? (e.g., Zigua, Nyakyusa) [open field]
4. Did your parents attend university? [yes; no; unsure]
5. What kind of school did you attend for your primary education? [English-medium; Swahili-medium; both; International school; other]
6. Are you an international student? [yes; no; unsure]
7. Are you Tanzanian? [yes; no] If yes, where were you born? (Please indicate both Region and District of birth) [open field]
8. Where do your parents live currently? (If your parents live in more than one place, please tell us where your mother lives currently.)

Country: [open field]

Town/City: [open field]

1. What levels or kinds of education have you completed before enrolling at UDSM? (Choose all that apply.)

* High school
* Certificate
* Ordinary diploma
* Advanced diploma
* Bachelor’s degree
* Master’s degree
* NTA level
* Other [open field]

1. Are you currently employed? [yes; no] If yes, what is your current position? [open field]
2. Have you been employed in the past? [yes; no] If yes, what was your most recent position? [open field]
3. Do you consider yourself to have a disability? [yes; no; prefer not to say]
4. What was your graduating division in high school? [I; II; III; IV; 0]
5. What grade did you receive in high school English? [A; B; C; D; E; S; F; not applicable or don’t remember]
6. Have you taken a Communication Skills course at the college level before enrolling at UDSM? [yes / no] If yes, what grade did you receive? [A; B; C; D; F; don’t remember]
7. Compared to your peers, how would you rate your writing skills in English (i.e., your ability to write essays and other assignments for university)? [excellent; good; average; weak; very weak]
8. Have you ever attended private English writing classes, (i.e., an English language course or ‘tuition’)? [yes; no]
9. Compared to your peers, how would you rate your oral presentation skills in English? [excellent; good; average; weak; very weak]
10. Compared to your peers, how would you rate your reading skills in English? [excellent; good; average; weak; very weak]
11. Compared to your peers, how would you rate your note-taking skills? [excellent; good; average; weak; very weak]
12. Compared to your peers, how would you rate your listening skills? [excellent; good; average; weak; very weak]
13. What average grade do you expect to receive in your first year of studies at UDSM? [A; B; C; D; F]
14. What do you intend to do after completing your undergraduate degree at UDSM? Check all that apply.

* Graduate school
* Professional program
* Private training program or course
* Career in the public sector
* Career in the private sector
* Career in the non-profit sector
* Self-employment
* Other [open field]

1. What is your degree program? [open field]
2. CL106 is a Communication Skills course for students planning to study humanities, social sciences, and education. Compared to your peers, how would you rate your skills and knowledge in the field of humanities, social sciences, and education (EXCLUDING communication skills). [excellent; good; average; weak; very weak]
3. What grade do you expect to receive in CL106?
4. How concerned are you that your communication skills will impact your success at university? [extremely concerned; moderately concerned; neutral; slightly concerned; not at all concerned]
5. How likely do you think it is that CL106 will impact your success at university? [very likely; somewhat likely; neutral; somewhat unlikely, not likely]
6. The following is a list of the skills and knowledge areas that CL106 will teach you. Please indicate which of those skills and knowledge areas you feel you need to improve in order to be successful in university and in the workplace. Check all that apply:
   * human communication skills
   * listening and note-taking skills
   * public speaking skills
   * reading skills
   * writing skills
7. How important do you think a good grade in CL106 is to your success at UDSM? [extremely important; moderately important; neutral; not very important; not at all important]
8. How likely do you think it is that you will use the skills and knowledge you learn in CL106 in other courses at UDSM? [very likely; somewhat likely; neutral; somewhat unlikely; not likely]
9. In which of the following courses do you think you will be likely to use the Communication skills and knowledge you learn in CL106? Check all that apply.
   * LL 102 Social and biological aspects of language
   * PL 111 Introduction to critical thinking and argumentation
   * LT 119 Literature and the art of writing
   * HM 100 Introduction to Heritage Management
   * HI 222 War, patriotism and nationalism
   * LL 221 Varieties of English
   * LL 303 Historical and comparative linguistics
   * HI 360 Economic history of Tanzania: Part 1
   * HM 300 Ethics in cultural tourism

1. How confident are you that you will do well in CL106? [very confident; somewhat confident; neutral; somewhat unconfident; very unconfident]
2. [logic question for all who answer 1-4 on likert scale on previous question] You indicated you are not entirely confident that you will do well in CL106. Which of the following reasons explain why you feel this way? Check all that apply.

* I do not speak English as my first language
* I did not attend an English-medium school in high school
* I have received poor instruction in English in the past
* I do not have much practice writing in English
* I do not have much practice speaking in English
* I have always been bad in English
* I don’t like writing in English
* I don’t like speaking in English
* I don’t think I will need the skills that are taught in CL106 in other courses
* I don’t think I will need the skills that are taught in CL106 in my job
* I am not a confident writer
* I am not a confident speaker
* English is hard to learn
* I don’t like reading in English
* I find it difficult to focus when reading in English

1. How confident are you that you will be able to use the skills and knowledge you acquire in CL106 in other courses at UDSM? [very confident; somewhat confident; neutral; somewhat unconfident; very unconfident]
2. [logic question for all who answer 1-4 on likert scale for previous question] You indicated you are not entirely confident that you will be able to use the skills and knowledge you acquire in CL106 in other courses at UDSM? Which of the following reasons explain why you feel this way? Check all that apply.

* Other professors in other courses ask for a different kind of writing
* I won’t need to do much writing in other courses
* The writing assignments in other courses are graded differently
* The writing assignments in other courses are very different from Communication Skills writing assignments
* I’m not a good writer, so it doesn’t matter what I learn in this Communication Skills course
* I need to take more than one Communication Skills course to improve my writing
* I’m not interested in improving my communication skills, so not really trying in this course
* Other [open field]

1. How confident are you that you will be able to use the skills and knowledge you acquire in CL106 in the jobs you have after graduating university? [very confident; somewhat confident; neutral; somewhat unconfident; very unconfident]
2. [logic question for all who answer 1-4 on likert scale for previous question] You indicated you are not entirely confident that you will be able to use the skills and knowledge you acquire in CL106 in the jobs you have after graduating university. Which of the following reasons explain why you feel this way?

* The places where I expect to work will require a different kind of writing than what is taught in my Communication Studies course
* I won’t need to do much writing in my job
* I’m not a good writer, so it doesn’t matter what I learn in this Communication Skills course
* I need to take more than one Communication Skills course to improve my writing
* I’m not interested in improving my communication skills, so not really trying in this course
* I’m a much better communicator in Swahili and I expect to use Swahili more after graduating from university
* Other [open field

**Measuring transfer from first-year communication courses:**

**A longitudinal mixed-methods study at UDSM**

**Post-Survey Questions (End of Third Year, June 2025)**

**CL106 Students Only**

1. Please provide your full name. [open field]
2. Please provide your UDSM student number. [open field]
3. Compared to your peers, how would you rate your oral presentation skills in English? [excellent; good; average; weak; very weak]
4. Compared to your peers, how would you rate your reading skills in English? [excellent; good; average; weak; very weak]
5. Compared to your peers, how would you rate your note-taking skills? [excellent; good; average; weak; very weak]
6. Compared to your peers, how would you rate your listening skills? [excellent; good; average; weak; very weak]
7. What do you intend to do after completing your undergraduate degree at UDSM? Check all that apply.

* Graduate school
* Professional program
* Private training program or course
* Career in the public sector
* Career in the private sector
* Career in the non-profit sector
* Self-employment
* Other [open field]

1. Compared to your peers in your program, how would you rate your skills and knowledge in the field of humanities, social sciences, and education (EXCLUDING communication skills)? [excellent; good; average; weak; very weak]
2. How concerned are you that your communication skills have impacted your success at university? [extremely concerned; moderately concerned; neutral; slightly concerned; not at all concerned]
3. You have now taken a full two years of courses since completing CL106. How useful did you find the skills and knowledge you acquired in CL106 for the assignments you did in the courses you took this year? [very useful; somewhat useful; neutral; not very useful; not at all useful]
4. Please list the courses you took this year in which you were able to use the communication skills and knowledge you acquired in CL106. [open field]
5. Please list the courses you took this year in which you were NOT able to use the communication skills and knowledge you acquired in CL106. [open field]
6. How well did CL106 prepare you for the writing assignments you did in your courses this year? [very well; somewhat well; neutral; not very well; not at all well]
7. How well did CL106 prepare you for the reading you needed to do in your courses this year? [very well; somewhat well; neutral; not very well; not at all well]
8. How well did CL106 prepare you for the public speaking you needed to do in other courses this year? [very well; somewhat well; neutral; not very well; not at all well]
9. How well did CL106 prepare you for the listening and note-taking you needed to do in other courses this year? [very well; somewhat well; neutral; not very well; not at all well]
10. Reflecting on your experiences in your third year of university, what was the most useful thing you learned in CL106? [open field]
11. Reflecting on your experiences in your second year of university, what was the least useful thing you learned in CL106? [open field]
12. What should be changed in CL106 to help you develop the communication skills you need in your other courses? [open field]

1. After completing CL106 and taking three years of courses at UDSM, how confident do you feel about your communication skills? [very confident; somewhat confident; neutral; somewhat unconfident; very unconfident]
2. [logic question for all who answer 1-4 on likert scale for previous question] You indicated you are not entirely confident about your communication skills. Which of the following reasons explains why you feel this way? Check all that apply.

* I do not speak English as my first language
* I did not attend an English-medium school in high school
* I have received poor instruction in English in the past
* I do not have much practice writing in English
* I do not have much practice speaking in English
* I have always been bad in English
* I don’t like writing in English
* I don’t like speaking in English
* I haven’t had many opportunities to practice my communication skills in my university courses
* English is hard to learn
* I don’t like reading in English
* I find it difficult to focus when reading in English

1. How confident are you that you will be able to use the skills and knowledge you acquired in CL106 in the jobs you have after graduating university? [very confident; somewhat confident; neutral; somewhat unconfident; very unconfident]
2. [logic question for all who answer 1-4 on likert scale for previous question] You indicated you are not entirely confident that you will be able to use the skills and knowledge you acquire in CL106 in the jobs you have after graduating university. Which of the following reasons explain why you feel this way?

* The places where I expect to work will require a different kind of writing than what was taught in CL106
* I won’t need to do much writing in my job
* I’m not a good writer, so it doesn’t matter what I learned in CL106
* I need to take more than one Communication Skills course to improve my writing
* I wasn’t really interested in improving my communication skills when I took CL106, so didn’t try as hard as I could have
* I’m a much better communicator in Swahili and I expect to use Swahili more after graduating from university
* Other [open field]

**Interview Protocol**

**Content Area Instructors**

**Years 1-4**

**Preamble**

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research project and for sharing some of your time with me to conduct this interview. As you know, I am part of a research team studying the long-term impact of Communication courses on students’ writing and communication skills. We are specifically interested in knowing whether UDSM students transfer the skills and knowledge they acquire in their Communication Studies courses to other courses or work they do after graduating. This project will also help the Centre for Communication Studies determine whether it is successfully achieving its objectives in offering communication service courses to first-year students.

My objective in this interview is to get an understanding of two things: 1) your perceptions of UDSM students and their strengths or weaknesses with regards to communication skills; and 2) your understanding of the institutional context within which we are working. Because we are tracking the students from their first-year Communication Skills course over 4 or 5 years to see how their communication skills develop, I am particularly interested in knowing your thoughts about the group of students you had in YOUR CLASS THIS YEAR.

This interview will likely take between 45 and 60 minutes. We are recording this interview so that we have an accurate record of what is said, and we will be taking notes throughout.

As the Informed Consent form states, we will not use your name when writing up the results of our research (we will use pseudonyms), but the content of your responses may make it possible for a reader to identify you as the speaker, so you should NOT assume complete anonymity when responding to our questions.

If you decide to withdraw from this project after the interview concludes, simply contact one of the Principal Investigators by email and we will destroy the audio file and transcript of our discussion. (We will likely be publishing the results of the first stage of this research within a year . . . after which point, withdrawal will of course be impossible).

Contact information for both PIs is on your copy of the Informed Consent form. Please feel free to follow up with them after this interview if you have questions, concerns, or something to add.

Do you have any questions about the process or this research more generally before we proceed?

**Questions / Prompts**

1. Can you tell us a little bit about yourself, please? Where did you get your education / training? [Prompt for specific schools and years of graduation.] How long have you been teaching in the Department of \_\_\_\_\_\_ at UDSM? What is your area of specialization?
2. Can you tell us about your teaching philosophy? What are your core ideas about teaching? What practices do you use in the classroom, in your course design, or in your grading that make you an effective teacher? [Prompt, if necessary, to ensure the answer is specific to teaching in their specific field.]
3. How important do you think it is for students in [Department / Discipline name] to have strong Communication skills? [Probing questions: How is a student’s ability to excel in your courses in [Department / Discipline name] impacted by their communication skills? Can a student do well in your courses if their communication skills are weak? Can they do well if they have good communication skills but limited knowledge in the field?]
4. Do you believe all students in your Department should have to take a first-year Communication Skills course? [Probing questions: Should they take more than one course? Should there be some other kind of support? Do your colleagues in your Department see the Communication Skills courses as important?]
5. Can you tell us about the students you typically have in [course name]? How would you characterize these students? [Probing questions: What are their strengths and weaknesses? How well prepared are they in terms of their background knowledge in [Department / Discipline name]? How well prepared are they in terms of their communication skills? Note, we are asking for details below—this is a general question only.]
6. Were the students you had this year different in any significant way from those you typically see in your class? [Prompt: What were their strengths and weaknesses? Were they more or less prepared than usual? Can you think of any examples to illustrate how some of these students were unique or was the profile of a typical [course name] student you gave above accurate for this year’s class? Were their writing and reading and speaking skills in English stronger or weaker or pretty much the same?]
7. What was the average grade in [course name] this year? Is this lower or higher than usual? [Prompt to get a sense of the grade breakdown and whether there were more or less strong students than normal]
8. Can you describe the writing assignments students completed in [course name] this year? [Probe to get details such as assignment names; length; genre; role occupied by writer; audience for whom student writes; requirement for research (i.e., number of primary / secondary sources); whether drafts were graded before the final submission; amount of classroom writing instruction (workshops, etc.); amount of scaffolding; writing resources provided by instructor]
9. Can you describe any other communication assignments (for example, oral presentations) students completed in [course name]?
10. The first-year Communication Skills course your students took has five areas of focus: 1) Public Speaking and Presentations; 2) Listening and Notetaking; 3) Reading; 4) Writing; 5) The Nature of Human Communication. I’m now going to ask you about your students’ abilities in each of these areas.
    * Based on what you saw in [course name] this year, how would you characterize your students’ **public speaking** skills? Excellent? Good? Adequate? Weak? Very weak? Can you describe situations where students do well with their public speaking? Can you describe situations where students have difficulties with public speaking? How do you know this? [Probe for examples / details.]
    * Based on what you saw in [course name] this year, how would you characterize your students’ l**istening and note-taking** abilities? Excellent? Good? Adequate? Weak? Very weak? Can you describe situations where students seem to listen and take notes effectively? Can you describe situations where students seem to experience difficulties with listening and note-taking? How do you know this? [Probe for examples / details.]
    * Based on what you saw in [course name] this year, how would you characterize your students’ **reading** abilities? Excellent? Good? Adequate? Weak? Very weak? What kinds of texts do students seem to be able to read well? What kinds of texts seem to challenge students? How do you know this? [Probe for examples / details.]
    * Based on what you saw in [course name] this year, how would writing characterize your students’ **writing** abilities? Excellent? Good? Adequate? Weak? Very weak? Can you think of contexts or assignments where your students seem to write well or in the manner you expect? Can you think of contexts or assignments where your students don’t seem to have the writing skills they need or you expect? How do you know this? [Probe for examples / details.]
    * Generally speaking, do you think your students understand the **nature of human communication as** it relates to the subject matter in [course name]? Are they able to apply use their understanding of human communication when engaging with course concepts and doing course assignments? Why do you say this? [Probe for examples / details.]
11. Given your experience this year, do you think the curriculum of the first-year Communication Skills course taken by your students prepared them for the communication work they did in [course name] [Prompt for details. If yes, ask why and request examples of aspects of the course that do prepare students for other courses. If no, ask why and request examples.]
12. *[Only ask this if the answer to question 11 above is not “yes, the students were very well-prepared]* Why don’t you think students are able to transfer more of the skills and knowledge they are taught in their first-year communications course to your course?
13. Do you know whether the assignments in your course are similar to those in the first-year Communication Skills course your students took? [Prompts: Have you ever discussed the writing assignments you have designed for [course name] with a Communication Studies instructor? Do you know if the language in your instructions is similar to that in Communication Skills assignments? Do you know if the assignment type or genre is similar or different? Do you know if the grading criteria are similar or different? Do you think you grade students’ writing in a manner similar to the way instructors of the Communication Skills courses grade students’ writing? [Probe for details and examples.]
14. Can you tell me about any writing or communication instruction you provide to students in [course name] [Probing questions: Do you spend class time going over instructions or grading rubrics for your assignments? Do you offer workshops or deliver lectures to help students understand your expectations for their writing or presentations? Do you allow students to submit drafts of assignments so they can get feedback before a due date? Do you run peer feedback sessions in class? Do you advise students to get feedback on their writing from other sources before submitting it for grades?]
15. What do you think is the best way to provide writing or communication instruction and support to students in [course name]? [Probing questions: Should students take more Communication Skills courses? Should they get discipline-specific writing / communication instruction throughout their degree? Should UDSM have a Writing or Communication Centre to which instructors can send their students? Should content-area course instructors also teach communication skills? Should Communication instructors co-teach or collaborate with content-area instructors?]
16. Do you have anything else you’d like to say that will help us understand more about UDSM students’ ability to transfer and use the skills they were taught in their first-year Communication Skills courses to other contexts?

**Interview Protocol**

**Communication Instructors (CL106, CL108, CL111)**

**Debrief: Year 1**

**Preamble**

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research project and for sharing some of your time with me to conduct this interview. As you know, I am part of a research team studying the long-term impact of Communication Skills courses on students’ writing and communication skills. We are specifically interested in knowing whether UDSM students transfer the skills and knowledge they acquire in their Communication Skills courses to other courses or work they do after graduating. This project will also help the Centre for Communication Studies determine whether it is successfully achieving its objectives in offering communication service courses to first-year students.

My objective in this interview is to get an understanding of two things: 1) your perceptions of USDM students and their strengths or weaknesses with regards to communication skills; and 2) your understanding of the institutional context within which we are working. Because we are tracking the students from your CL106/108/111 class for the next 4 or 5 years to see how their communication skills develop, I am particularly interested in knowing your thoughts about the group of students you had THIS YEAR. So, I will be asking you to reflect on the effectiveness of the curriculum, assignments, and pedagogical strategies you used THIS YEAR in your Communication course.

This interview will likely take between 45 and 60 minutes. We are recording this interview so that we have an accurate record of what is said, and we will be taking notes throughout.

As the Informed Consent form states, we will not use your name when writing up the results of our research (we will use pseudonyms), but the content of your responses may make it possible for a reader to identify you as the speaker, so you should NOT assume complete anonymity when responding to our questions.

If you decide to withdraw from this project after the interview concludes, simply contact one of the Principal Investigators by email and we will destroy the audio file and transcript of our discussion. (We will likely be publishing the results of the first stage of this research within a year . . . after which point, withdrawal will of course be impossible).

Contact information for both PIs is on your copy of the Informed Consent form. Please feel free to follow up with them after this interview if you have questions, concerns, or something to add.

Do you have any questions about the process or this research more generally before we proceed?

**Questions / Prompts**

1. We already know quite a bit about you, your teaching philosophy and your view of the field of Communication Studies, so let’s just jump into a discussion of the Communication Skills class you taught this year. Were the students you had this year different in any significant way from those you typically see in your class? [Prompt: were their writing and reading and speaking skills in English stronger or weaker or pretty much the same? What were their strengths and weaknesses? Were they more or less prepared than usual? Can you think of any examples to illustrate the ways in which some of these students were unique or was the profile of a typical CL106/108/111 student you gave us in July accurate for this group?]
2. Was the average student in CL106/108/111 sufficiently prepared for the course this year? In other words, did they have the necessary skills to be successful in the course and benefit from what they are being taught? [Prompt: Be sure to ask for examples, (such as assignments/readings that students do well on or struggle with) that illustrate students’ preparedness or lack thereof.]
3. What was the average grade in the class this year? Is this lower or higher than usual? [Prompt to get a sense of the grade breakdown and whether there were more or less strong students than normal]
4. What assignments did the students do well on? What assignments did they struggle with?
5. What topics or concepts did students respond well to? What topics or concepts did they struggle with?
6. What was the biggest challenge for students who didn’t do well?
7. Now, I’d like to ask about the relationship between CL106/108/111 and other courses at UDSM. Given your experience this year, do you think the curriculum of CL106/108/111 is designed in such a way that it prepares students for the communication work they will need to do in \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ [insert appropriate disciplines]? [Prompt for details. If yes, ask why and request examples of aspects of the course that do prepare students for other courses. If no, ask why and request examples.]
8. Given your experience this year, what, if anything, do you think could be changed in CL106/108/111 to better prepare students for the communication work they will do in \_\_\_\_\_ [insert appropriate disciplines]?
9. What, if anything, do you think could be changed in other courses in \_\_\_\_\_\_ [insert appropriate discipline] to help students apply and build upon the communication skills they learned in your course.
10. You might recall our discussion in July of the different theories for why students do not seem to be able to transfer the writing skills they learn in a first-year course such as CL106/108/111 to other courses. One of the most compelling explanations is that students seem to believe that the writing and communication work they do in other courses is TOTALLY DIFFERENT from what they are taught in a course like CL106/108/111. Given your experiences this year, do you think this is true? [Prompts: Ask the instructor if they are aware that writing assignments are totally different in other courses. Ask the instructor if students believe this, even if it’s false. Ask for examples / evidence.]
11. As you know, we are going to be tracking your students over the next 4 or 5 years, collecting samples of their writing, interviewing them, and inviting them to complete surveys about the development of their communication skills. We are hoping to find evidence that they are using the skills and knowledge you teach them in CL106/108/111 in other courses and even in their workplaces after graduation. What do you expect or hope for us to find? What skill or concept did you teach that you expect students to use in their other courses? What skill or concept did you teach that you expect students to not use at all or very often in their other courses? What attitudes or abilities about Communication do you think they will find useful in other courses or contexts?

**Interview Protocol**

**Students**

**Year 1**

**[Note to interviewer: Many of the questions have multiple parts. Be sure to pause after each part of the question to allow students time to respond. Do NOT ask all parts of the question at once.]**

**Preamble**

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research project and for sharing some of your time with me to conduct this interview. As you know, I am part of a research team studying the long-term impact of Communication Skills courses on students’ writing and communication skills. We are specifically interested in knowing whether UDSM students transfer the skills and knowledge they acquire in their Communication Skills courses to other courses or work they do after graduating. We also want to improve our understanding of how students’ writing and communication skills develop over time. This project will help the Centre for Communication Studies improve the support it provides to UDSM students.

My objective in this interview is to get an understanding of three things: 1) your perceptions of what you learned in your Communication Skills course; 2) your perceptions of the writing and communication work you have done in other courses; 3) your sense of how your writing and communication skills have developed over time. This interview will likely take between 45 and 60 minutes. We are recording this interview so that we have an accurate record of what is said, and we will be taking notes throughout.

As the Informed Consent form states, we will not use your name when writing up the results of our research (we will use pseudonyms). None of the information we publish in any reports on this research will use your name.

As you know, we will be interviewing you and asking you similar questions every year until you graduate, and then interviewing you again one year after you graduate. You are free to withdraw from this project at any time. To withdraw, simply contact one of the Principal Investigators by email and we will stop interviewing you and collecting your writing samples.

Please note, however, that if you withdraw we will retain any audio files or transcripts of the interviews you have already conducted. We will also keep any writing samples you have given us.

Contact information for both PIs is on your copy of the Informed Consent form. Please feel free to follow up with them after this interview if you have questions, concerns, or something to add.

Do you have any questions about the process or this research more generally before we proceed?

**Questions / Prompts**

1. Can you tell us a little bit about yourself, please? Where is your family from? Where were you born? Where did you go to high school? Was your high school English-medium or did it use another language? Have you taken any English courses outside of high school?]
2. What is your first language? Second language? Do you speak other languages? What language(s) do you usually speak at home? With friends?
3. How would you rate your writing and communication skills in English? For example, would you say they are above average, average, or below average? Can you explain your response?
4. Do you enjoy writing and communicating in English? [Probing questions: What kinds of writing and communicating do you not enjoy? What kinds of writing and communicating in English do you enjoy the most? In what context do you find yourself writing or communicating in English the most?]
5. Where or in what contexts do you most often write and communicate in English?
6. How confident are you in your writing and communication skills in English? What contexts are you confident in? Not confident in?
7. How important do you think it is for students in [Department / Discipline name] to have strong communication skills? [Probing questions: How is your ability to excel in courses in [Department / Discipline name] impacted by your communication skills? Can you do well if your communication skills are weak? Can you do well if you have good communication skills but limited knowledge in the field?]
8. Do you believe all students in your [Department / Discipline name] should be required to take a first-year Communication Skills course? [Probing questions: Should they take more than one course? Should there be some other kind of support or instruction? Do other students in your Department see the Communication Skills courses as important?]
9. Now, I’d like to shift our focus to the first-year Communication Skills course you took this year. First, how well prepared do you think you were for [CL course name]? [Probing questions: Did you have the writing skills you needed to follow the classes and do the assignments? Did you have the reading skills you needed? Were there any other foundational academic skills you felt you should have had to benefit from the course?
10. Can you tell me about your experience in [CL course name]? What grade did you receive? What would you say are the most important things you learned? Did the course help improve your communications skills? [Probe for details.] Did the course improve your confidence in your own communication skills? [Probe for details.]
11. Can you tell me about the assignments in [CL course name]? [Probe to get details such as assignment names; length; genre; role occupied by writer; audience for whom student writes; requirement for research (i.e., number of primary / secondary sources); whether drafts were submitted and feedback provided before the final submission; amount of assignment-specific instruction (workshops, etc.); amount of scaffolding.] What was your instructor hoping you would learn from the assignments? What skills and knowledge did you acquire from the assignments?
12. Can you tell me about the major tests in the course? How did you do on them? What was the focus of the tests? What knowledge and skills were you tested on? To what extent do you think they helped you improve your communication skills?
13. Can you tell me about the writing and communication work you did in OTHER courses this year? [Probe to get details such as assignment names; length; genre; role occupied by writer; audience for whom student writes; requirement for research (i.e., number of primary / secondary sources); whether drafts were submitted and feedback provided before the final submission; amount of assignment-specific instruction (workshops, etc.); amount of scaffolding; writing resources provided by instructor.]
14. [CL course name] has five areas of focus: 1) Public Speaking and Presentations; 2) Listening and Notetaking; 3) Reading; 4) Writing; 5) The Nature of Human Communication. I’m now going to ask you about your learning experience in each of these areas.
    * How valuable did you find the instruction on Public Speaking and Presentations? Do you think you have improved your understanding of this area of communication? Do you think you have improved your skills in this area? How confident are you about the Public Speaking you need to do for other courses or contexts?
    * How valuable did you find the instruction on Listening & Note-Taking? Do you think you have improved your understanding of this area of communication? Do you think you have improved your skills in this area? How confident are you about your Listening and Note-Taking skills for other courses or contexts?
    * How valuable did you find the instruction on Reading? Do you think you have improved your understanding of this area of communication? Do you think you have improved your skills in this area? How confident are you about the Reading you need to do for other courses or contexts?
    * How valuable did you find the instruction on Writing? Do you think you have improved your understanding of this area of communication? Do you think you have improved your skills in this area? How confident are you about the writing you need to do for other courses or contexts?
    * How valuable did you find the instruction on the nature of human communication generally? Do you think you have improved your understanding of the nature of human communication? Do you think you are able to transfer this understanding of human communication to other courses or contexts?
15. Have you been able to apply any of the knowledge and skills you acquired in [CL course name] to the work you have done in other courses? [Probe for details. Ask about each of the five areas of focus identified in Question 13, above.]
16. Do you think you will be able to apply the knowledge and skills you acquired in [CL course name] to the work you do in other courses you take in the future? Why or why not? [Probe for details. Ask about each of the five areas of focus identified in Question 13, above.]
17. From your perspective as a student, what do you think is the best way to provide writing or communications instruction and support to students in courses in [Department / Discipline name? [Probing questions: Should students take more Communication Skills courses? Should they get discipline-specific writing / communication instruction throughout their degree? Should UDSM have a Writing or Communication Centre to which instructors can send their students? Should [Department / Discipline name] course instructors also teach communication skills in their courses? Should Communication instructors co-teach or collaborate with [Department / Discipline] instructors?]
18. Do you have anything else you’d like to say that will help us understand more about your ability to transfer and use the skills you were taught in [CL course name] to other contexts?