

Communication Skills Course Syllabi in Tanzanian Universities: Saliencies, Omissions and Gaps

The current study analysed communications skills content areas as presented in the course outlines of twelve universities offering such courses. Document review was used as the data gathering tool. We sought to identify saliencies in the courses, take note of any gaps and omissions in the course outlines and discuss the implications of such in terms of the overall aim of the communications skills courses. The findings revealed that the course outlines revolved around four major content areas: theories of communication, language skills and grammar, and study skills. The study skills were more inclined towards English for general purposes rather than for academic purposes. Also a good number of universities do not have listening skills in their curricula and quite a few do not offer speaking skills. Examination taking skills are included in only two course outlines while note-making and referencing skills are excluded in all studied course outlines. It is concluded, inter alia, that such variability, gaps and omissions raise a question as to whether a serious needs analysis as well as situational analysis, both of which are crucial steps prior to academic literacy courses, were ever carried out prior to designing the course outlines.

Keywords: *Communication Skills, English for Academic Purposes, Grammar, Language Skills.*

Introduction

In academic settings from secondary school up to university level, second language (L2) students face many challenges. These challenges include the need for a large, academically oriented vocabulary, the ability to communicate reasonably effectively, a set of strategies when working with difficult ideas, and ability to combine reading and writing (reading/writing) skills to learn and display content (Grabel and Zhang, 2013). Such difficulties stem from limited reading and writing proficiency, the challenge of reading long passages, a lack of fluency in reading and writing, limited L2 background knowledge, and relatively little experience (and practice) integrating reading and writing skills for academic purposes (Grabel and Zhang, 2013). Kim's (2001) study of the English summary writing of 70 South Korean university students revealed they had difficulties producing summaries requiring them to use their own words.

In African countries, this case also applies, though at varying magnitudes depending on the quality of the language policy, political will of actors in the realms of curricula, material development, testing and evaluation, and language teacher preparation and development. In South Africa, several studies show that students entering higher education struggle to write effectively and are, therefore, under-prepared for studies in institutions of higher learning. Moutlana (2007) examined literacy levels in South Africa and noted that the low literacy standard among students was due to the student under-preparedness at various levels. Fregeau's (1999) study showed that students were admitted to different disciplines without having acquired the academic

1 English writing skills they needed to succeed in those courses. Recently,
2 Nizonkiza and Van Dyk (2015) explored the extent to which vocabulary size
3 matters in academic literacy. They studied first-year students at North-West
4 University who were served with the Vocabulary Levels Test and the test
5 scores were used to estimate students' vocabulary size and subsequently
6 mapped onto the levels distinguished by the Test of Academic Literacy Levels
7 (TALL). The findings showed that, on average, the vocabulary size of first-
8 year students at North-West University is approximately 4,500 word families, a
9 size large enough to allow them to follow lectures in English and that students
10 with large vocabularies had higher academic literacy proficiency. Similarly,
11 Van Dyk et al. (2016) examined the relationship between productive
12 knowledge of collocations and academic literacy among first year students at
13 North-West University using a collocation test adapted from Nation's (2006)
14 word frequency bands., They found that, overall, knowledge of collocations
15 was significantly correlated with academic literacy, which was also observed at
16 each of the frequency bands from which the items were selected.

17 In Ghana, Afful (2007) studied the offering of Communication Studies
18 (CS) at the University of Cape Coast (UCC) and noted that its content revolved
19 around three areas: remediation, study skills, and writing skills and that it was
20 taught in two semesters. He is also critical of the fact that the course is tailored
21 with a view of academic literacy as a homogeneous, monolithic or univariant
22 set of skills which students are supposed to demonstrate. In an earlier study,
23 Afful (2005) explored the interface between rhetoric and disciplinary variation
24 (focusing on three departments, namely; English, Sociology, and Zoology) and
25 noted that some academic members of staff felt that CS was useful and that
26 students themselves were not appropriating it partly because the lecturers were
27 not reinforcing the skills learnt but other members questioned the usefulness of
28 the course, some even suggesting that CS be replaced with Writing Centers,
29 modeled after those in universities in the USA.

30 In Nigeria, a research by Anasiudu (1983) studied writing errors by
31 university students in Nigera using a cloze test and he observed that the
32 students' writing was so poor that he wondered what would have become of
33 them if there were no communication skills course. Most of the errors were of
34 global nature that interfered with communication. Another study was by
35 Oluikpe (2004) who researched the effect of English for Academic Purposes
36 (EAP) method on the achievement of University of Nigeria first year Education
37 Arts and Science students in expository writing. He found out that gender was
38 not a significant factory on students' overall achievement in expository
39 writing although the mean achievement score of females was slightly
40 higher than that of their male counterparts. In Namibia, a study by Smit (2006)
41 on listening comprehension in academic lectures focusing on the role of
42 discourse markers at the University of Namibia revealed that the students
43 experienced overall difficulty with comprehending and recalling information
44 from oral content lectures. She also observed that in general, very little
45 attention is given to the development of listening skills in L2 ESP and EAP
46 courses. In Kenya, Kurgat (2010) carried out a study tracing the challenges facing

1 language programmes that started in the 1980s with the aim of exposing the
2 changes of bringing innovations to such programmes. He used communication
3 skills programmes as his case study.

4 The situation in Tanzania shows that students are really struggling with
5 low English language proficiency at interpersonal level, let alone in academic
6 settings. This is besides the specified aims and objectives of secondary education,
7 as stipulated in *Education and Training Policy*, which is, among others,
8 “promoting the development of competency in linguistic ability and effective
9 use of communication skills...in at least one foreign language (MOEVT,
10 1995:6). Studies show that the situation is quite the opposite of such ideals both
11 at secondary level (e.g. Mlama and Matteredu, 1978; Cripser and Dodd, 1984;
12 Malekela, 2000; Brock-Utne, 2002) as well as at tertiary level (e. g. Cripser
13 and Dodd, 1984; Rugemalira, 1990; Ndoloi, 1994; Puja, 2001; Wilson, 2011;
14 Elisifa, 2013).

15 Thus, it can be noted from the reviewed studies that there is a big problem
16 of poor language proficiency notably academic writing the universities even
17 after communication skills courses have been offered. These under-prepared
18 students struggle to cope with the oral and writing tasks that are expected of
19 them in higher education teaching and learning contexts (crf. Cliff and Hanslo,
20 2009; Maloney, 2003). As a result, their experiences of academic speaking and
21 writing tasks tend to be negative. According to Niven (2005), the problems of
22 under-prepared students’ experience with writing at university are due to the
23 wide gap between writing expectations and demands between school and
24 university. Therefore, universities should be expected to put in place proper
25 structures that can support under-prepared students to start addressing and
26 improving their specific academic writing needs.

27 To address the situation, universities and other tertiary level institutions
28 introduced some in-session courses called ‘communication skills’ or ‘study
29 skills’, the implementation of which, according to Komba and Kafanabo (2012),
30 has been based on the assumption that a threshold level of English proficiency is
31 necessary for students to succeed in their academic work. Afful (2007)
32 observes that universities in Africa generally use labels such as *Communicative*
33 *Skills*, *Communication Skills*, or *Use of English* unlike other countries like
34 Singapore, where most institutions prefer to use the term *EAP*, or following
35 ESP tradition, terms such as *English for Business* or *English for Engineering*,
36 among others in order to situate the writing program in specific disciplinary
37 contexts.

38 At the University of Dar es Salaam, a Communication Skills course was
39 introduced for the first time in 1978 (Mlacha and Rea, 1985), at Sokoine
40 University of Agriculture it was introduced in 1987 (Komba and Kafanabo,
41 2012) while at the Open University of Tanzania, it was introduced in 2009 (Elisifa,
42 2013).

43 Some evaluative studies have been done with regard to a) the dimension of
44 the content of communication skills courses at advanced level of secondary
45 education (Mbuligwe, 1995), b) their impact on students’ development of
46 communicative abilities (Komba, 2008), c) persistence of students’ language

1 problems even after the offering of the course (Obston, 1982; Numi and Mcha,
2 1986; Numi and Lwaitama, 1998; Ndoloi, 2003; Elisifa, 2013), d) the course
3 relevance and effectiveness of such courses (e.g. Msuya, 2011), and e) predictive
4 validity of examinations in such courses on the students' overall academic
5 performance (Komba and Kafanabo, 2012).

6 However, one notes that such studies were case studies handling one
7 particular communication skills course in isolation. While such an approach is
8 validated by its in-depth probing of issues, it fails to give a bigger picture
9 where one could note the extent to which the content is alike or differ and gaps
10 that they leave (if any) and the implication of such gaps or omissions. This
11 study is an attempt to do that.

12 The current study aimed at doing a comparative analysis of the contents of
13 communication skills course outlines in Tanzanian universities so as to identify
14 the saliencies of the coverage, note the gaps that some course outlines leave
15 and comment on omissions of necessary items by all the course outlines.
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18 **Participants and Methods**

19 *Sample and Sampling*

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22 Twelve universities/higher learning institutions were purposely selected,
23 six from among the public institutions and the remaining six from private or
24 religious agencies' institutions. The nature of inclusion was dependent upon the
25 institution's willingness to avail their course outlines. The list of the institutions
26 and their respective communication skills course outlines are as detailed in
27 Table 1 below.
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Table 1. *Sample Strata of Participants in the Study*

s/n	University	Course code and Name
1	University of Dar es Salaam	CL 106: Communication Skills for Arts and Social Sciences
2	Open University of Tanzania	OFC 017: Communication and Study Skills
3	Dar es Salaam Institute of Technology	GSU 07106: Technical Communication Skills
4	Moshi University College of Cooperative and Business Studies (MUCOBUS)	MAL 102: Communication Skills
5	Kampala International University	KIU: Communication Skills
6	University of Dodoma	LG 0103: Communication Skills
7	University of Zanzibar	EG 118: English Communication Skills 1
8	St. John's University	CL 100: Communication Skills
9	Sokoine University of Agriculture	CS 100: Communication Skills
10	Muslim University of Morogoro	EL 110 : Communication Skills
11	Mwenge University College of	CSK 111: Communication Skills

	Education	
12	Sebastian Kolowa University College (SEKUCO)	SCS101: Communication Skills

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Instrumentation

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Given the nature of the study which is on curriculum appraisal, document review was the only data gathering tool that was used. The documents in the context of this study were the official course outlines of the twelve sampled universities as listed in the third column of Table 1 above.

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Data Analysis Process

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The scope of this study was on the content part of the course outlines. We first read through the contents of each course outline taking note of the number and kinds of modules so as to get a guide to the thematic chunking of the instructional items. Having identified the outlines that were most comprehensive in the aspects introducing the notion of communication, language skills (writing, reading, speaking and listening), grammar, and study skills (note taking and examination taking skills), we came up with four thematic areas: Communication theory, Language skills, Grammar, and Study skills. What was the keen quest to us, as described in the aim of the study, was saliencies, gaps and omissions in each of the course outlines focusing on the implication of such issues in terms of the overall aim of communication skills which make students more prepared to handle both interpersonal and, most importantly, academic tasks.

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Findings and Discussion

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The findings were arranged according to the four themes that featured in most detailed course outlines. These are communication theory, language skills, grammar and study skills.

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Communication Theory

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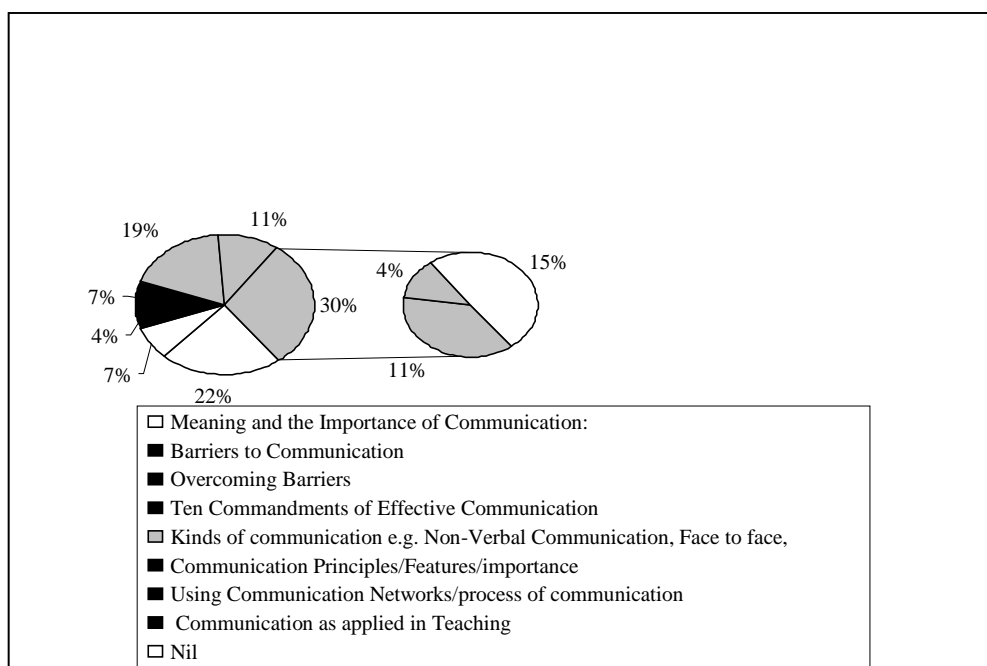
We were first interested in finding out the coverage of theory of communication by various universities so as to get the gist of the extent of salience but also the differing levels of omission either on specific items or whole omission. This was done by first identifying the items of the course outlines and then tallying the frequencies of occurrence of such items and the results are as summarized in Figure 1 below.

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Figure 1. Communication Theory Coverage

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As Figure 1 above reveals, meaning and the importance of communication was the most popular among the sampled universities since six of them opted for them. The course outlines that had such item are CL 106. KIU, OFC 017, MAL 102, CSK 111 and LG 0103. Kinds of communication ranked second with six universities incorporating it in their course outlines. These outlines are KIU, LG 0103, CL 106, and CSK111 and SCS101. Communication principles, features or importance, on the one hand, and using communication networks/process of communication, on the other hand, were included in three universities as seen in their outlines (i.e. KIU, CSK 111 and LG 0103). The rest of the items were not very popular since they were noted to be handled in only one university each. These were 'overcoming barriers to communication' and 'improving communication which was peculiar for KIU and UDSM, respectively, while 'Communication as applied in teaching' was only found in SCS 101.

The complete omission of this particular module on communication theory was by four universities as observed in their course outlines: GSU 017, EG117, CS100, and EL110. Such omission might be due to the fact that, as a skill, communication skills courses ought to be practical-oriented where the learners would be engaged in learning how to use language in handling academic and other social tasks. So these universities might want to optimize the chance of their students gaining the skill based, practical items by not focusing on communication theories.

The second dimension in the theoretical aspects of communication is the extent of coverage of the items in question. This was again done by listing down individual university course outlines and, depending on the number of items of the theory of communication each outline has, we passed an impressionist verdict on the extent of coverage as it appears in Table 2 below.

1 **Table 2.** *The Coverage of Theory of Communication*

s/n	Course	Extent of coverage
1	CL 106	Very little
2	OFC 017	Very little
3	GSU 07106	None
4	MAL 102	Little
5	KIU	Extensive
6	LG 0103	Fair/good
7	EG 118	None
8	CL 100	Very little
9	CS 100	None
10	EL 110	None
11	CSK 111	Fair/good
12	SCS101	Fair/good

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3 The data summarized in Table 2 above are very telling of variability in the
4 extent of coverage of theory of communication by individual universities. KIU
5 is the only one which has an extensive coverage of theory of communication in
6 which there are two out of five modules dedicated to communication theory
7 with each having seven items. Udom's LG0103, MWUCE's CSK 111 and
8 SEKUCo's SCS 101 have their coverage rated 'fair' or 'good' by virtue of
9 having one module or a number of items which are of fair coverage to at least
10 capture necessary aspects of communication theory such as meaning, scope,
11 types and principles of communication. Others such as UDSM's CL 106, St
12 John's CL 100 and OUT's OFM 017 were rated 'very little' (ranging from one
13 (e.g. OFM 017) to two (e.g. CL 106). As noted earlier, four out of twelve
14 (which is about 33%) universities that were included in the sample had no
15 modules/items on communication theory.

16 *Language Skills*

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19 In academic literacy, language skills are the most fundamental working
20 tools in the production and comprehension of any academic work in any
21 discipline. Without language skills, academic English is but an abstraction for
22 intellectual inquiry. In that spirit, this study sought to find out the extent to
23 which the four language skills: writing, reading, speaking and listening, feature
24 in communication skills course outlines. The sections that follow are the
25 presentations and analyses of this task.

26 *Writing*

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29 Writing has been the skill that is most valued in tertiary institutions as
30 most of what gets communicated and examined is done via writing. Course
31 handling (for lecturers and students alike), testing and examining, academic
32 reports and certification and any other form of administrative and legal
33 execution of tertiary institution require this skill. Thus we were interested to
34 find out the coverage of this important skill in communication skills course

1 outlines and the extent to which the skill items are inclined towards academic
 2 writing. To achieve this, items for each course outlines were isolated and put in
 3 a column and then judgment was made regarding their inclination as to whether
 4 they are inclined towards Writing for General Purposes (henceforth WGP),
 5 Writing for General Academic Purposes (henceforth WGAP) or Writing for
 6 Specific Academic Purposes (henceforth WSAP). The results are as summarized
 7 in Table 3 below.

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9 **Table 3. Presentation and Bias of Writing Skills**

	Item	Inclination
1) CL 106 (UDSM)	Identifying writing task requirements (essays, reports, letters, memos etc.)	WGAP
	Generating ideas/information	WGP
	Organizing ideas into an outline	WGP
	Paragraph development	WGP
	Logic and argumentation	WGAP
	Style and punctuation	WGAP
	Integrating graphic information with text	WGAP
	Citations, quotations, paraphrases and referencing	WGAP
	Revising, rewriting, editing and proofreading	WGAP
2) CL 100/CL 101 (St John's University)	Letter writing skills	WGP
	Write and present short reports	WGAP
	Advanced letter writing skills	WGP
CS 100 (SUA)	Sectioning in speech and writing	WGP
	Planning essays and other texts thought reduction	WGAP
	Developing ideas	WGP
	Organizing information	WGP
	Paragraph structure	WGP
	Presenting information	WGAP
	Dictionary reference and vocabulary building	WGP
	Orthographic conventions	WGP
	Essays: argumentative, descriptive, etc	WGAP
	Reports: experiments, project, research, etc	WGAP
	Term papers	WGAP
	Supporting details in text development:	WGAP
	Use of examples	WGAP
	Cause and effect propositions	WGAP
	Referencing in written texts	WGAP
	Acknowledging sources	WGAP
Using other people's materials and making citations	WGAP	
Compiling a list of references	WGAP	
4) LG 0103 (UDOM)	Elements of effective writing,	WGP
	Writing styles,	WGP
	Scientific and technical writing,	WSAP
	Business letters;	WSAP

	Elements of business writing,	WSAP
	Kinds of business letters – purchase order, quotations and tenders,	WSAP
	Job application letters,	WSAP
	Personal resume and curriculum vitae etc.	WSAP
5) GSU 07106	Use vocabulary appropriately	WGP
WGP=2	Use types of sentences accurately	WGP
6) CSK 111 (MWUCE)	Punctuation (Capital letters, Full stops, Commas, Speech marks)	WGP
	Paragraphs	WGP

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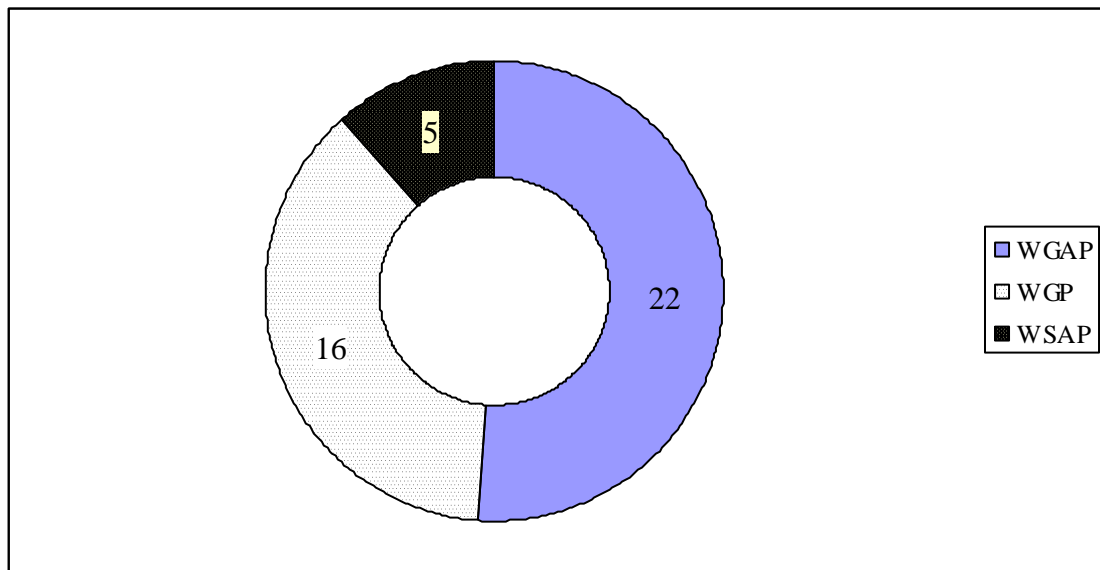
2 The data in Table 3 above reveals that SUA's CS 100 is the most
3 comprehensive for having a total 19 items which are equally highly diverse.
4 The majority of such items (13, which is 68.4%) are in the WSAP category
5 while 6 (which is 31.6%) belong to WGP category. However, none is of ESAP.
6 Ranking second in comprehensiveness is UDSM's CL 106 with a total of 9
7 items, 6 (66%) were of WGAP inclination while the remaining 3 (34%) were
8 inclined towards WGP. Like in CS 100, none were of CSAP type. LG 010,
9 while has its writing elements more or less like CL 106, is unlike others for
10 having WSAP, which also predominated by being 6 out of 8 (which is 75%).
11 The rest, as shown in the table, are not as comprehensive; the items ranging
12 between 2 and 3 are almost wholly WGP.

13 Generally most writing items are for general academic purposes, which
14 suggest that the students may have skills related to academic writing that are
15 applicable in all disciplines but may find difficulties in writing within specific
16 genres such as Law, Business, and Engineering.

17 However, there are also course outlines which completely omitted this
18 important language skill in academia. These are EG 118, EL 110, OFC017,
19 GSU 07106, MAL 102, KIU, CSK 111, and SCS101, their total of which is 7,
20 which is 58.3% of all the sampled communication skills. Unless these universities
21 have some other writing courses (for all students, as UDSM has CL 111 for
22 Engineering, Cl 108 for Business Studies, and CL 107 for Natural and Applied
23 Sciences), and some of the items are biased on academic environments, the
24 crisis will continue of having students who are not only unable to handle basic
25 writing tasks in general, but also completely illiterate in the realm academic
26 writing.

27 The researcher summed up all items of the three writing inclinations,
28 irrespective of the universities that offer the course, which resulted into overall
29 varying levels of magnitude of the three writing inclinations as illustrated in
30 Figure 2 below.

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1 **Figure 2.** *Communication Skill Courses' Writing Skill Bias/Inclination*

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4 As detailed in Figure 2 above, one notes that the courses are more inclined
5 to focus on WGAP, which is a credit since at least the course designers (and
6 this is only for 4 out of 12 courses) had in mind the fact that students need to be
7 equipped with what Cummins (1984) calls CALP (i.e. Cognitive Academic
8 Language Proficiency), which is context reduced and more abstract and
9 characterized with specialized jargon and specific writing conventions. The
10 course designers are at par with Ndoloi's (1997) assertion that most Tanzanian
11 students, as they join tertiary institutions, are least prepared for joining the
12 discourse community to which they sought to be members. However, there is also
13 a fair amount of WGP which takes into consideration the fact that the students also
14 need BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills). Cummins, (1984)
15 explains why such items as letter writing skills, developing ideas, and use of types
16 of sentences accurately feature in WGP category of writing.

17 *Reading*

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20 Reading is also a crucial skill, an equal partner of writing skills, only at the
21 receptive level. It is through reading that students consume materials from their
22 instructors in the form of handouts, search and consume academic information
23 from the library as well as examination instructions and questions before
24 embarking on writing. It is also through reading that students get to know laws
25 and by-laws and other social engagements of the institution. We thus needed to
26 find out the extent to which this equally important skill was differentially
27 presented in the tertiary institutions involved in the study and their bias/
28 inclinations. The procedural steps that were involved in arriving at Table 3 for
29 writing skills were also employed in the data for reading as they appear in
30 Table 4 below.

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1 **Table 4. Presentation and Bias of Reading Skills**

Item	Freq.	Inclinations
Effective scanning and skimming	5	RGP
Deciding on purpose for reading	4	RGP
Good reading habits/Methodologies	4	RGP
Using connecting words and reference words to enhance comprehension	4	RGP
Reading techniques/strategies	2	RGP
Intensive and extensive reading	2	RGAP
Deduction, inference and managing difficult words	2	RGAP
Retrieve technical information and restructuring for use/Interpreting figures and tabulated information	2	RSAP
Generic 'reading'	1	RGP
Summaries of texts	1	RGP

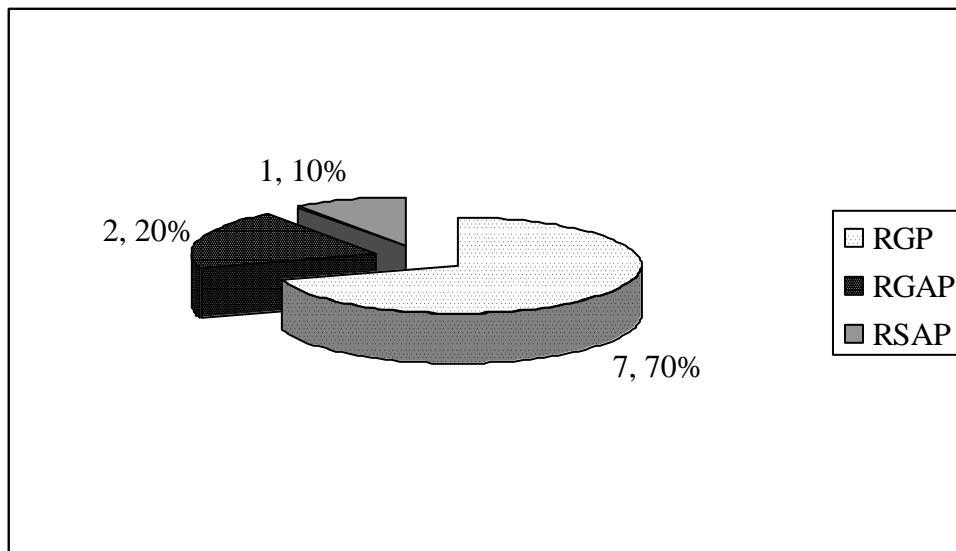
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3 The findings in Table 4 reveal that scanning and skimming as reading
4 strategies ranked most popular among the sampled universities. This was
5 included in five out of 12 course outlines, which are CL 106, LG 0103, CS100,
6 EL110, and CSK111. Furthermore, that particular item is inclined towards
7 Reading for General Purposes (RGP) where it can be employed in any reading
8 environment, including social and academic. The same is true for deciding on
9 purpose for reading, included in four course outlines (CL 106, CS100, EL110,
10 CSK111), good reading habits/methodologies/, was also included in four course
11 outlines (CL 106, LG 0103, CS100, CSK111), and using connecting words and
12 reference words to enhance comprehension, which is incorporated in two
13 course outlines (CL 106, CS100). These three items came after items that were
14 labeled 'effective scanning and skimming' and were inclined towards Reading
15 for General Purposes (RGP). In other words, the four most prominent items in
16 terms coverage in the course outlines among the sampled universities are
17 geared towards promoting general proficiency to make the students better
18 readers in any situation. However, the fact is that there are academic specific
19 reading strategies which are unlike reading for general purposes.

20 However, two of the items: 'intensive and extensive reading', and 'deduction,
21 inference and managing difficult words' of Reading for General Academic
22 Purposes (RGAP), allow the learner to gain skills in reading for academic
23 purposes, whatever the discipline. These three items were only included at three
24 universities each, notably CL 106, LG 0103 and CS 100. Only one item: retrieve
25 technical information and restructuring for use/Interpreting figures and tabulated
26 information, which was included in only two of the sampled course outlines (GSU
27 07106 and CS100), was biased towards Reading for Specific Academic Purposes
28 (RSAP), which within engineering/ technical environment. RSAP, unlike RGP,
29 focuses on genre-specific mode of articulating and assigning of meaning e.g.
30 'sentence' in legal reading is quite unlike in linguistics.

1 If all items are summed up we get 10 and, when computed against the
 2 frequencies of inclination/bias of reading, we get the differing levels of magnitude
 3 as illustrated in Figure 3 below.

4
 5 **Figure 3.** *Communication Skill Courses' Reading Skill Bias/Inclination*



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 8 Figure 3 illustrates and reiterates more forcefully the fact that Reading for
 9 General Purposes (RGP) overwhelmingly predominates the reading syllabi in
 10 the sampled universities. RGAP is handled by only by two universities while
 11 RSAP is by only one university (GSU 07106). It is, however, worth noting that
 12 strategies of RSAP are quite unlike RGP, even though there are some
 13 similarities.

14 Here, like with the writing skill, we have universities of which completely
 15 omitted the reading skill in their course outlines. However, unlike in the
 16 writing skill, reading skill has been omitted by 4 universities, namely; KIU,
 17 EG118, CL100 and SCS101. What is more serious is that some universities
 18 completely omitted both writing and reading skills. These are KIU, EG118 and
 19 SCS101.

20 21 *Speaking*

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 23 Speaking is a fundamental oral-productive skill where human beings make
 24 their ideas, feelings, attitudes and beliefs known to others. In academic settings,
 25 speaking fundamentally entails knowledge of the art and science of making
 26 oral presentations, which require careful planning that include making an
 27 audience analysis, analyzing the situation of presentation and being aware of the
 28 organizational pattern. Jordan (2010) adds that the language used in academic
 29 speaking is normally formal or neutral, and obeys the conventions associated
 30 with the genre or activity. This explains why this skill is crucial in academic
 31 setting and would thus be mandatory in communication skills syllabi (or course
 32 outline, in our case), since its scope of application, as Jordan (2010) observes,

1 includes asking questions in lectures, participation in seminars/discussions,
2 making oral presentations, answering ensuing questions/points, and verbalizing
3 data, and giving oral instructions, in seminars/workshops/laboratories.

4 We thus wanted to find out the extent to which this skill is incorporated in
5 the sampled universities' communication skills course outlines. To achieve
6 this, we isolated items for each course outline and put them in a column and
7 then we assigned each its categorical membership regarding its inclination as to
8 whether it belongs to Speaking for General Purposes (henceforth SGP), Speaking
9 for General Academic Purposes (henceforth SGAP) or Speaking for Specific
10 Academic Purposes (henceforth SSAP). The resulting data are as presented in
11 Table 5 below.

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13 **Table 5. Presentation and Bias of Speaking Skills**

Item	Freq.	Inclinations	Course Outlines
Speaker skills/presentation methods	6	SGP	CL 106, MAL 102, KIU, LG 0103, CS 100, CSK 111
Preliminary considerations/preparation	4	SGP	CL 106, KIU, LG 0103, CS 100
Using visuals to simplify, quantify, simulate, illustrate, record etc.	3	SGAP	CL 106, LG 0103, CS 100
Non-verbal communication/Paralanguage	3	SGP	CL 106, GSU 07106, CSK 111
Techniques of using feedback	2	SGP	CL 106, KIU
Organizing and managing meetings	2	SGP	MAL102, KIU
Performing technical presentations and briefings	1	SSAP	GSU 07106
Presentation (use of appropriate language signals, appropriate vocabulary and register)	2	SGAP	CS 100, CSK 111
Discussions	1	SGAP	CSK 111
Nil	5		OFC017, EG118, CL100, EL110, SCS101

14
15 What immediately captivates attention in the data in Table 5 is the fact
16 that the majority of the items (five of them) are inclined towards SGP, meaning
17 the speaking aspects being taught are those that make one an effective speaker
18 in whatever situation, formal and informal, academic and social. What is also
19 striking is the fact that these items are the most popular among the sampled
20 universities. The most predominant in this group is speaker skills/presentation
21 methods, which has been found in 6 out of 12 course outlines (which is 50%).
22 Such course outlines are CL 106, MAL 102, KIU, LG 0103, CS 100 and CSK
23 111. Preliminary considerations/preparation has been addressed by 4 (33%)
24 course outlines, namely; CL 106, KIU, LG 0103 and CS 100.

Four items, though comparably far less popular, are of SGAP bias and the most popular is *using visuals to simplify, quantify, simulate, illustrate, record etc.* which has been addressed by four course outlines, namely; CL 106, LG 0103 and CS 100. The rest not as less prominent as they have been included one or two course outlines only.

Like in writing and reading, there are also a good number of universities the course outlines of which completely left out the speaking skill. The skill has been left out by 5 (41.7%) course outlines, which are OFC017, EG118, CL100, EL110 and SCS101. The assumption behind this omission might be the long term fallacy that speaking is a naturally endowed skill and therefore it does not need any teaching.

Listening

Listening is said to be an active process by which students make sense of, assess, and respond to what they hear. In that sense listening is a critical skill in both in maintaining our personal relationships as well as taking notes in class. Thus, it is through listening that students make sense of, assess, and respond to what they hear in the academic world. It is in that background that we were interested to find out the extent to which this skill, more often taken for granted, is addressed in the course outlines under study. The items about listening and their frequencies of occurrence as well as inclination/bias are presented in Table 6 below.

Table 6. Presentation and Bias of Listening Skills

Item	Freq.	Inclination	Course Outlines
Developing listening skills/Take and make notes/Listening to Lectures/Giving feedback	5	LGAP	GSU 07106, MAL 102, CL 100, CS 100, CSK 111,
Kinds of listening (comprehensive, intensive, active, passive etc	3	LGP	MAL 102, CSK 111,
Factors contributing to effective listening/paying attention to tone & listening for gist	3	LGP	MAL 102, LG 0103, CL 100, CSK 111
Functions of active listening/recognizing signals in spoken texts	3	LGP	MAL 102, CS 100, CS 100
The listening process	2	LGP	MAL 102, LG 0103,
Barriers to active listening	2	LGP	MAL 102, LG 0103,
Comprehend technical information	1	LSAP	GSU 07106
Generic 'listening'	1	LGP	OFC017
Understanding formal and informal speech	1	LGP	CSK 111
Communicating more effectively in relevant professional settings.	1	LGAP	CL 100
Nil	5		KIU, EG 118, EL 110, CL 106, SCS 101

1 The data in Table 6 show that listening has a total of 10 items although
2 four of them got addressed by only one course outline while two were
3 addressed by two course outlines each. The most popular is *developing listening*
4 *skills/Take and make notes/Listening to Lectures/Giving feedback* which was
5 included in five course outlines. These are GSU 07106, MAL 102, CL 100, CS
6 100, and CSK 111. This item befits the popularity given its being Listening for
7 General Academic Purposes (henceforth LGAP) and focuses specifically on
8 developing skills for note taking and note making as well as on giving
9 feedback. A less popular item: *communicating more effectively in relevant*
10 *professional settings*, which was in only one course outline (CL 100).

11 Under Listening for General Purposes (henceforth LGP), there are a total
12 of 7 items (which is 70% of all the items). However, though many, the 7 items
13 are not quite popular among universities. Some are quite vague (in addition to
14 their being most unpopular); e.g. *generic 'listening'* and *understanding formal*
15 *and informal speech*. These are vague in the sense that they either do not specify
16 what an instructor ought to do with listening or failing to show the link between
17 speech (which is a productive skill) and listening, an aural-receptive skill.

18 However, there is only one item under Listening for Specific Academic
19 Purposes (LSAP): *Comprehend technical information*, which was in only one
20 course outline (GSU 07106) of which university is a technical engineering one.

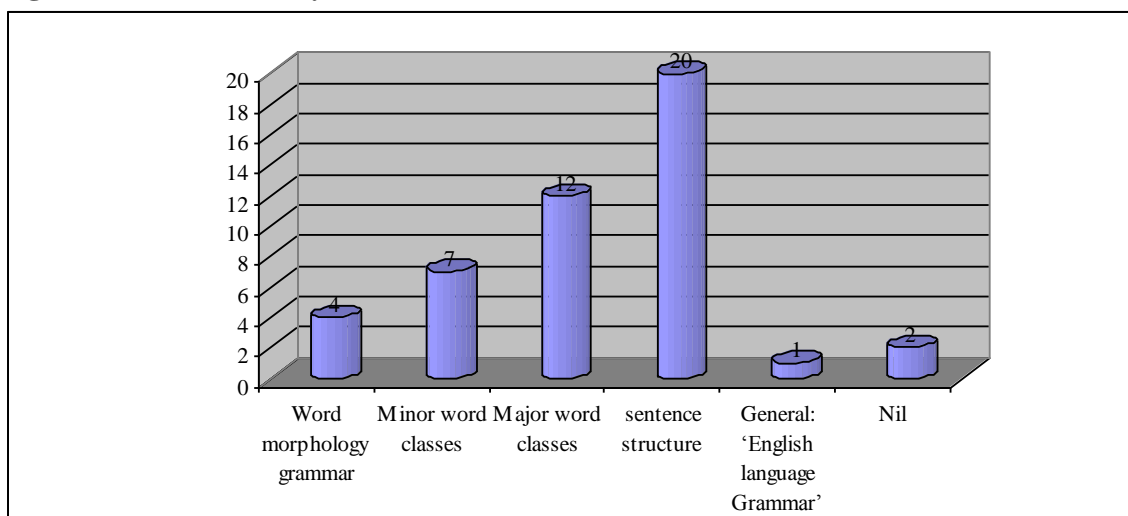
21

22 *Grammar*

23

24 Grammar is said to be an integral part of English for academic purposes.
25 This has been the case in the communication skills' course outlines that are
26 under the current study. Some course outlines such as CS 100 have as many as
27 22 items of grammar while others, like CL 100, have as few as 3 items. To
28 shorten the list of items, we built four major themes, guided by Haspelmath's
29 (2001) distinction and listing between minor word classes and major word
30 classes. Haspelmath distinguishes the two this way: "Major word classes (also
31 known as content word classes) are generally open (i.e., they accept new
32 members in principle) and large (comprising hundreds or thousands of words),
33 and content words tend to have a specific, concrete meaning. They tend to be
34 fairly long (often disyllabic or longer), and their text frequency is fairly low.
35 By contrast, function word classes are generally closed and small, and function
36 words tend to have abstract, general meaning (or no meaning at all, but only a
37 grammatical function in specific constructions). They tend to be quite short
38 (rarely longer than a syllable), and their text frequency is high" (p.16538). We
39 then added two items: generic 'language grammar' and the 'nil' column, the
40 frequencies of occurrences of which are summarized in Figure 4 below.

41

1 **Figure 4.** *Presentation of Grammar in the Course Outlines*2
3

4 The most dominant grammatical item is sentence level grammar, which has a
5 grand total of 20 occurrences, which is similar to 45.5% of all 44 frequencies. It is
6 worth explaining that the frequencies (i.e. 20) outnumber the total number of
7 course outlines (i.e. 12) because of recurring items within some of the course
8 outlines that could be classified in the same category. This category of sentence
9 level grammar was also most popular as it was addressed by 9 out of 12 course
10 outlines (which is 75%), which are OFC017, GSU 01706, MAL 102, LG 0103,
11 EG 118, CL 100, CS 100, EL 110, and CSK 111.

12 Ranking second is major word categories, which has 12 frequencies of
13 occurrences (similar to 27.3%) and has been included by 6 (50%) of the 12
14 outlines. These are CL 106, MAL 102, LG 0103, EG 118, EL 110, and CSK 111.

15 Word morphology, involving inflectional and derivation process, isn't as
16 popular since only GSU 01706, LG 0103 and CS 100 had them in their grammar
17 modules. Yet scholars like Carlisle (1995), argue for the importance of English as
18 Second language learners developing what he called *morphological awareness*,
19 by which he means their "conscious awareness of the morphemic structure of
20 words and their ability to reflect on and manipulate that structure" (p. 194). The
21 popularity of grammar is also signaled by having only one course outline (i.e.
22 KIU) not including it in the modules.

23

24 *Study Skills*

25

26 In the realm of study skills, two content areas were addressed by some
27 course outlines as detailed below.

28

29 *Note Taking*

30

31 Note taking is a crucial study skill the effective mastery of which, according
32 to Bahrami and Nosratzadeh (2017), helps students to save time for reading all
33 textbooks for their exams or for their representations, increases attention of

1 students to read or heard materials, helps them to remember what they learnt,
 2 absolutely important information. We therefore felt the urge to find out the
 3 extent to which this important study skill was included in the course outlines
 4 under study. To attain this, the items were all put in one column irrespective of
 5 a specific course outline then similarities were put together to establish
 6 frequencies as summarized in Table 7 below.

7
 8 **Table 7.** *Extent of Presentation Note-taking Skills*

Item	Freq.	Course Outlines
Identifying purpose for writing notes	3	CL 106, CS 100, CSK111,
Characteristics of note taking/ Organization and layout	3	CL 106, CS100, EL111, EL111, CSK 111,
To listen and take notes effectively/brevity skills	3	CL 100, CS 100, CL111, EL111, CSK 111,
Information structure in spoken and written texts	1	CL 106
Recognizing meaning makers	1	EL111
Nil	6	OFC 017, GSU 07106, KIU, LG 0103, EG 118, SCS101

9
 10 The data in Table 7 reveal that note-taking items were only five, three of
 11 which were addressed in three of the course outlines, while the remaining two
 12 were addressed by only one course outline each. The major words that capture
 13 one's attention in the items are the purpose, characteristics, layout and brevity
 14 skills, all of which are key in the mastery of note-taking. However, less clear is
 15 the link between note-taking and information structure.

16 Also, 6 (50%) of 12 sampled course outlines completely omitted this module.
 17 These are OFC 017, GSU 07106, KIU, LG 0103, EG 118, and SCS101. This
 18 omission suggests that either the course designers did not find the skill important
 19 or (which is unlikely) they may have a separate course handling study skills,
 20 which would thus include note-taking.

21 One sub-skill, a sister to note-taking, the note-making skill, has not been
 22 part of any course outline. This implies that the art of students extracting
 23 information from written material or from spoken/recorded academic discourse
 24 and consequently make their own notes is not being taught. However, scholars
 25 like Sarada (2006) see note making as a basis or foundation for doing other
 26 writing exercises like précis writing, summarizing and essay writing. Babu
 27 (2015) adds that note making acts as a useful teaching aid whereby relevant
 28 information is highlighted and condensed in good notes. Hence, good notes are
 29 helpful to pick out the key points on a particular subject.

30 31 *Examination Skills*

32
 33 Examination taking skills is yet another important practical package for
 34 students, especially in higher learning institutions. Its rationale is that studying
 35 is only a part of getting good results in one's exam since no matter how hard

1 one studies, if she/he does not possess the necessary skills about taking a test or
 2 examination, she/he will not perform well. However, this set of skills was only
 3 addressed by 2 (16.7%) of 12 course outlines sampled. These were CS 100, which
 4 had one item of understanding and interpreting essay questions, and MAL 102,
 5 which also had 6 other items, namely;

- 6
- 7 a) *Preparing for examinations*
- 8 b) *revision programme*
- 9 c) *use of past papers*
- 10 d) *techniques for approaching examination questions (multiple choice*
 11 *questions, filling-in questions, true-false questions)*
- 12 e) *Taking examinations*
- 13 f) *challenges in examinations*
- 14

15 The rest of the course outlines which are 10 (83.3%) out of 12 did not
 16 address this skill at all. The implication of this is that students are left to bank
 17 on their incidental learning through interaction with older colleagues or their
 18 own ingenuity. Scanlan (2006) strongly insists that passing the examination is a
 19 product of two things: i) knowledge of the subject matter and ii) good test/
 20 examination-taking skills.

21 Also, the whole aspect of study skills has not been comprehensively addressed
 22 since it has been confined to examination skills (by only two course outlines) and
 23 note-taking skills. However, according to Pauk and Owens (2005), study skills
 24 include four components: i) permanent skills, which include goal setting, time
 25 management, staying focused, defending one's memory and stress management;
 26 ii) Enrichment skills, which include improving one's reading, building lasting
 27 vocabulary, and thinking visually; iii) Note-taking skills that include adopting a
 28 note-taking mindset, taking effective notes, and note-making, and iv) test/
 29 examination taking skills, which include managing test anxiety, answering
 30 objective questions and tackling essay questions.

31 32 33 **Conclusion**

34
35 This paper has made a detailed and illustrative analysis of Communication
 36 Skills Course content in the sampled universities and the following are the
 37 conclusions:

- 38
- 39 a) Although course outlines share most of the content areas, they differ
 40 significantly in their degree of emphasis on particular language aspects.
- 41 b) With some crucial academic literacy aspects omitted e.g. note-making,
 42 examination-taking skills (at most universities), citation and referencing
 43 skills, students are left to rely on incidental learning or survive through
 44 trial-and-error in their academic engagements.
- 45 c) The variability in the emphasis on some specific academic literacy
 46 skills and the omission of others by different universities point to the

1 logical fact that graduates from these universities will also be of various
 2 qualities. What poses a challenge is that these graduates tend to seek
 3 admission to universities whose emphasis/instructional provisions in
 4 academic literacy is more vigilant and detailed, or vice versa.

- 5 d) The variability, gaps and omissions raise a question as to whether a
 6 serious needs analysis as well as situational analysis, both of which are
 7 crucial steps prior to academic literacy courses, were ever carried out
 8 prior to designing the course outlines.

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