

STRENGTHENING EDUCATORS' COMMUNICATION AND DOCUMENTATION COMPETENCE THROUGH FEATURE WRITING AND PHOTOGRAPHY TRAINING

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ABSTRACT: *This descriptive-evaluative study assessed a targeted professional-development program designed to strengthen educators' competence in feature writing and basic photography for institutional communication and documentation. Thirty-five educators from a state university in Northern Mindanao participated in experiential, application-oriented sessions on narrative construction, journalistic style, visual composition, and audience-centered communication. Data were obtained from pre- and post-training self-assessments, participant evaluation forms, semi-structured interviews, facilitator observations, and expert review of written and photographic outputs. Mean self-ratings increased in feature-writing organization (2.8 to 4.1), clarity (3.0 to 4.3), photography composition (2.5 to 4.0), photography relevance (2.7 to 4.2), and overall confidence (2.6 to 4.4). Thematic analysis generated three themes: professional empowerment through skill development, peer support and reflective learning, and challenges in application and sustainability. The convergence of quantitative and qualitative evidence indicates marked perceived improvement and stronger readiness to produce institutionally relevant communication outputs. The findings support sustained, practice-based faculty development that combines authentic production tasks, coaching, differentiated activities, and institutional opportunities for continued application.*

Keywords: communication competence; educator training; feature writing; institutional documentation; photography; visual storytelling

INTRODUCTION

Effective institutional communication requires educators to translate academic activities, research, extension initiatives, and quality-assurance evidence into clear written narratives and purposeful visual records. Feature writing and photography are therefore practical tools for documentation, stakeholder engagement, knowledge sharing, and institutional visibility. Yet these tasks are frequently assigned to faculty members whose formal preparation emphasizes teaching and disciplinary expertise rather than journalistic writing, visual composition, or multimodal communication.

Recent evidence strengthens the case for professional development that is closely connected to teachers' actual communication work. A 2026 systematic review and meta-analysis of writing-focused professional learning found an overall positive effect on the quality of writing instruction while also noting the continuing scarcity of rigorous studies in this area [1]. A 2025 design-based study of online professional development for writing instruction likewise found gains in teachers' knowledge and self-efficacy when learning was content-focused, active, coherent, sustained, and responsive to teacher feedback [2]. These findings are directly relevant to the present intervention because feature-writing competence is more likely to develop when educators produce authentic texts, receive guided feedback, and revise their work in context.

The visual dimension of institutional documentation also requires deliberate development. Recent studies published in 2025 provide particularly relevant evidence. Spaliviero and Serragiotto found that an online professional-development intervention using digital storytelling fostered teachers' multiliteracies and professional growth while also revealing contextual barriers to sustained application [5]. Li, Leung, and Yau likewise reported that an online digital-storytelling workshop strengthened teachers' perceived storytelling skills and supported practical classroom application [6]. Together with earlier teacher-education research on digital storytelling [7], these studies support treating narrative writing, image selection, visual framing, and audience awareness as

interconnected communication competencies rather than isolated technical skills.

A further concern is transfer. Communication skills learned during training do not automatically become workplace practice when opportunities for reinforcement, mentoring, or authentic application are limited [8]. Recent professional-development research similarly emphasizes iterative feedback, practical implementation, and sustained opportunities to use new learning [2,5,6]. This issue is particularly relevant to institutional documentation, where faculty may complete a workshop successfully but later face time constraints, uneven access to equipment, limited editorial support, or few formal channels for publication. Accordingly, the present study examined not only perceived skill gains but also participants' confidence, application challenges, and conditions needed to sustain the training outcomes.

The intervention was grounded in Experiential Learning Theory, which conceptualizes learning through concrete experience, reflection, conceptualization, and active experimentation [9]. It was also informed by Communication Accommodation Theory, which explains how communicators adapt language and style to audience, context, and social expectations [10]. Together, these perspectives support an approach in which educators learn by producing narratives and images, receiving audience-oriented feedback, revising outputs, and applying communication choices to authentic institutional situations. The study therefore evaluated changes in participants' self-assessed competencies and confidence, explored their learning experiences and challenges, and identified directions for strengthening future communication and documentation training.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Research design and participants

The study used a descriptive-evaluative design integrating quantitative and qualitative evidence. Participants were 35 educators from a state university in Northern Mindanao. Purposive selection was based on involvement in institutional communication, reporting, or documentation. The group

represented different academic and administrative units and varied in prior experience with feature writing and photography.

Training intervention

The program covered feature-writing organization, journalistic style, audience awareness, basic camera and smartphone techniques, composition, relevance, and visual storytelling. Sessions combined short inputs, demonstrations, guided practice, peer feedback, reflection, and revision. Participants developed feature-article drafts and photographs based on authentic institutional contexts. This production-and-revision design is consistent with recent writing-focused professional learning that emphasizes applied practice and feedback [1,2] and with contemporary digital-storytelling professional development integrating narrative, visual, and multimodal production [5-7].

Data collection

Pre- and post-training self-assessment forms measured perceived competence using a five-point scale. Participant evaluations, semi-structured interviews, and facilitator observations documented experiences, confidence, challenges, and perceived applicability. Two external communication experts reviewed selected outputs using criteria for clarity, organization, audience alignment, creativity, relevance, and technical execution. The expert review provided an external perspective that complemented self-reported change, although the available data did not include blinded ratings or inter-rater reliability statistics.

Data analysis and ethics

Mean scores summarized pre- and post-training self-ratings. Because the available dataset contained descriptive means rather than inferential test results, changes are reported as observed or perceived gains and not as statistically significant differences. Qualitative responses were analyzed thematically following Braun and Clarke's procedure [11]. Evidence from self-assessments, interviews, observations, and outputs was triangulated. Participants gave informed consent, and confidentiality and voluntary participation were observed.

RESULTS

Table 1 presents the pre- and post-training mean self-ratings. Increases were observed across all five indicators. The largest increase occurred in overall confidence (+1.8), followed by photography relevance (+1.5), photography composition (+1.5), feature-writing organization (+1.3), and clarity (+1.3).

Table 1. Pre- and post-training mean scores

Competency area	Pre	Post
Writing organization	2.8	4.1
Writing clarity	3.0	4.3
Photo composition	2.5	4.0
Photo relevance	2.7	4.2
Overall confidence	2.6	4.4

The qualitative evidence produced three themes. First, professional empowerment through skill development described participants' increased readiness to structure feature articles, select institutionally relevant angles, and capture more purposeful images. Second, peer support and reflective learning described how review, feedback, and a

collegial environment reduced hesitation and encouraged revision. Third, challenges in application and sustainability included uneven baseline competencies, limited equipment, inadequate time for refinement, and few formal platforms for showcasing outputs.

Triangulation showed convergence among self-assessments, participant accounts, expert-reviewed outputs, and facilitator observations. Reported gains in writing confidence were reflected in clearer organization and expression, while greater awareness of photography principles appeared in stronger composition and relevance of submitted images. Because the quantitative evidence was descriptive, this convergence is interpreted as corroborating perceived and observed improvement rather than demonstrating causal effectiveness.

DISCUSSION

The observed gains suggest that short, focused training can address communication tasks that educators routinely perform but may not have formally studied. This interpretation is supported by the 2026 systematic review of writing-focused professional learning, which found an overall positive effect on the quality of writing instruction [1], and by recent professional-development research showing that content focus, active learning, sustained engagement, and opportunities for application can strengthen teachers' knowledge and self-efficacy [2]. In the present study, the value of the intervention appears to lie less in exposure to isolated rules and more in the repeated cycle of producing, reviewing, and revising authentic institutional outputs.

The combination of narrative and visual work also aligns with very recent digital-storytelling research. A 2025 professional-development intervention with language teachers reported growth in multiliteracies alongside persistent challenges in transferring new digital practices to context [5]. Another 2025 study of an online digital-storytelling workshop found that teachers perceived gains in storytelling competence and practical application [6]. These findings complement earlier evidence from teacher education [7] and support the interpretation that participants' improvement in feature organization and photographic relevance reflects a broader multimodal communication competence involving purposeful selection, sequencing, audience awareness, and integration of verbal and visual meaning.

Audience awareness was central to both writing and photography. Participants learned to move beyond merely recording an event toward selecting information and images that communicate institutional meaning. This adjustment is consistent with Communication Accommodation Theory, in which communicators adapt messages to audience and context [10]. Peer review served as an immediate audience-response mechanism and encouraged participants to reconsider clarity, tone, emphasis, and visual framing. Recent professional-development studies likewise underscore the value of practical application, iterative feedback, reflection, and sustained opportunities to refine new practices [2,5,6].

The findings also point to the importance of transfer and sustainability. Møller et al. showed that communication skills taught in formal learning contexts may not transfer automatically to workplace practice without reinforcement and supportive conditions [8]. Recent studies similarly report that contextual limitations can constrain the continued use of newly developed writing and digital-storytelling practices

even after positive training outcomes [2,5]. Participants in the present study identified time, equipment, uneven baseline skills, and limited publication channels as barriers to continued application. These concerns suggest that one-off workshops should be followed by coaching, revision clinics, editorial mentoring, and authentic institutional assignments so that skills are rehearsed in the settings where they are expected to be used.

The study has several limitations. The sample came from one university, participation was purposive, and quantitative results were based primarily on self-assessment means. No control group, validated outcome scale, paired inferential analysis, blinded rating procedure, or long-term follow-up measure was available. Expert review strengthened triangulation, but the dataset did not permit calculation of inter-rater reliability or effect sizes. Consequently, the study supports perceived and observed improvement but does not establish causal effects or population-level generalizability. Future evaluations should incorporate validated measures, paired statistical tests, blinded output assessment, reliability estimates, and follow-up evidence showing whether participants continue to produce publishable institutional narratives and technically stronger photographs months after training.

CONCLUSION

The feature-writing and photography program was associated with marked improvement in educators' perceived competence, confidence, and readiness to produce institutional communication outputs. Participants valued authentic production tasks, peer feedback, and reflective practice, while also identifying constraints involving time, equipment, differentiated support, and opportunities for continued application. The expanded literature base—now anchored by 2025 and 2026 studies—shows that these findings are consistent with current research on writing-focused professional learning, digital storytelling, multiliteracies, and workplace transfer.

Higher education institutions may strengthen communication and documentation by embedding these competencies in regular faculty development, providing mentoring and revision clinics, and establishing official platforms where educators' written and visual outputs can be published, reviewed, and recognized. Future research should move beyond immediate self-report by examining objectively rated output quality, sustained transfer to workplace performance, and the longer-term contribution of communication training to institutional documentation and public engagement.

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