



Special Issue “Education in Emergency Situations: Prospects and Challenges”  
Research Article

## Influence of Social Media on Students’ Academic Writing and Performance: A Study within Ghanaian Senior High Schools Setting

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**Received:** 23 August 2022; **Revised:** 7 February 2023; **Accepted:** 18 February 2023

**Abstract:** The study explored the effects of social media on students’ academic writing in the Agona-West Municipality of the Central Region of Ghana. This study is a qualitative and is underpinned by interpretive philosophical thought. The data for this study were collected through a semi-structured interview and documents. Three (3) senior high schools were selected through purposive sampling techniques and the snowball sampling strategy was used to select thirty (30) students for the study. The findings indicated that the new trends in writing on social media sites affect students’ spellings in their school work. It was also found out that social media sites distract students from effectively engaging in their academic works, thereby negatively affecting their academic performances/results. This study will be of value to both English language teachers/learners, language planners and curriculum developers by exposing them to students’ sources of writing errors and providing useful suggestions to overcome them. It will also contribute to the body of knowledge by drawing the attention of educators/planners on the integration of technology, particularly the social media, in the English curriculum to facilitate the effective teaching/learning.

**Keywords:** social media, academic writing, writing skills

### 1. Background to the study

In its more basic sense, social media is a shift in how people engage, discover, read, write, share news and information and maintain in contact, Mazer (2007). It is a fusion of sociology and technology, transferring monologue into dialogue. Nowadays, the internet and its social platforms have been the most influential tools for staying connected with our families and friends. Social media plays a strong role in allowing people to be informed educated and/or to be entertained. People, especially teenagers, are purposely or covertly connecting to each other by communicating and informing themselves about the latest trends, events and happenings via these social media websites.

According to Mazer (2007), social media is imperative in today’s society and will undeniably be a major part of the global economy in the years ahead. Social media platforms such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, YouTube, Foursquare, Digg in and WhatsApp among other worldwide web applications have completely changed the way human beings communicate with one another. The English Spelling Society (2012) noted that the internet has revolutionized the

English language and made misspelling the norm. The Internet and social media platforms foster the belief that there is no need to correct typographical errors or conform to rules and hence, users are at liberty to abandon spelling rules, thereby encouraging children and students especially, to spell words incorrectly (Bovill, 2010).

Jones (2010) argues that: “we are now witnessing the effects these linguistic variations are having on children born into the computer age with such a high level of access in and out of schools. They do not question their existence”. Hetz et al. (2015) posits that social media and texting can damage children’s ability to relate with each other and new media increases access for lots of children but it doesn’t give them the experience of face-to-face contact. Jones (2010) considers that “We only get good at this with lots of practice”. Texting and social networking are preventing children from learning correct English and are linked to ‘rough behaviour’ as argued by Andrews et al. (2012). Pritchett noted that children appear ‘unmotivated in school’ and asked parents to encourage children to interact with each other. Hence, social media and texting are damaging children’s ability to communicate properly, which means that children express themselves through bad or violent behaviour. Pritchett laments, “Shakespeare went through a lot of trouble for our language, and now you’ve knocked away half the consonants” (Napoli, 2010).

### **1.1 Statement of the problem**

O’Keeffe et al. (2011) have shown that almost every student logs on to a social media site at least once a day. The results further show that most students believe that using shorthand writing is faster. Due to this act, most students must consult a spellchecker whenever they are writing an important article.

Many other researchers also show that students do not perform academically because they spend most of their time on social media instead of following news that will help them in their academics. Most students are always interested in newsfeed that connects them to their community of friends and not to the outside world.

Multiple reports from the Chief Examiners of the West African Examination Council over the years have shown that students show a poor command in their grammar and spelling. Between 2009 and 2021, the chief examiners report in English clearly emphasized students’ mixing up the upper case letters with lower case letters in their essay writing, and the plethora of the misuse of punctuation in their essay writing.

### **1.2 Purpose of the study**

The study aimed to explore and examine the effects of social media on students’ writing among selected Senior High School Three students in the Agona-West Municipality, Central Region, Ghana.

### **1.3 Objectives of the study**

Specifically, the objectives of this study are to:

- Identify the new trends in writing on social media platforms in the language of selected Senior High School Three students in Agona-West Municipality, Central Region.
- Examine the motivations for the use of social media platforms.
- Examine the effects of the new trends of writing on students’ writing and their academic performance.

### **1.4 Research questions**

This paper seeks answers to the following questions:

- What are the new trends in writing on social media platforms?
- What are the motivations for the use of social media platforms?
- What are the effects of this phenomenon on students’ writing and their academic performance?

## **2. Theoretical framework**

This paper is based on two theories of Constructivist Theory by Bruner (1966) and Writing Approaches by

Braddock et al. (1963).

## 2.1 Constructivist theory

The Constructivist Theory posits that learning is an active and constructive process.

The main proponents of this theory are Vygotsky, Piaget, Dewey, and Bruner (Bruner, 1966). Piaget focuses on the interaction of experiences and ideas in the creation of new knowledge. Vygotsky explores the importance of learning alongside peers and how culture affects the accommodation and assimilation of knowledge. And Dewey emphasizes inquiry and the integration of the real world and classroom activities.

It stipulates that the learner is an information constructor. Learners have to form/create their own presentations and new information is always linked to the knowledge they already have. Therefore, in the Constructivist Theory, instructors are not inclined to be part of the knowledge creation process. Instead, students should be allowed to construct knowledge for themselves. Thus, in this theory, students construct knowledge rather than acquire it. This knowledge, the theorists assume, should be constructed based on students' relevant previous knowledge and their personal experiences. Bruner's (1966) Constructivist Theory is a general framework for instruction based on the study of cognition. Learners engage in discovery learning and obtain knowledge by themselves. They select and transform information, construct hypotheses and make decisions, relying on a cognitive structure.

In order for discovery to occur, learners require background preparation in the form of cognitive structure that provides meaning and organization to experiences and allows the individual to go beyond the information given. Bruner emphasizes teaching as a means of enhancing cognitive development; hence, the task of the teacher is to translate information to be learnt into a format appropriate to the learner's current state of understanding.

He suggests that the theory of instruction should address four (4) major aspects:

- Predisposition towards learning.
- The ways, in which the body of knowledge is structured so that it can be most readily grasped by the learner.
- The most effective sequences, in which to present material.
- The nature and spacing of rewards and punishment.

## 2.2 Writing approaches

A research by Braddock et al. (1963) found that most students lack an assumed set of facts relating to writing skills. Within the past two decades, writing is considered more of a process than product, and this is why Berlin (1984) writes that composition theorists saw two major approaches to writing:

- Expressive → Writing results from creative inspiration.
- Cognitive → Writing results from conscious mental effort.

Wiener's Cybernetics (1948) and the developing discipline of cognitive psychology launched the cognitive process approach to understanding and teaching writing. Two kinds of cognitive approaches to the study and the actual teaching of writing were identified:

- Cognitive → the individual process.
- Social → a collaborative of effort.

The proponents observe that the writing process should include drafting, revising and editing. The proponents also outline three (3) basic assumptions underpinning the cognitive process in writing as follows:

- Writing is "international" (Smith, 1988). This implies that whatever one writes goes beyond the personal level, therefore, our writing in all circles should be within the acceptable convention known to all.
- Writing is a goal-driven activity (Flower & Hayes, 1981). This implies that the content of the material should be meaningful and understandable to all people.
- Writing is context-dependent (Smith, 1988). This means that writing and understanding depends on the linguistic context of the person who interprets.

Critics of the cognitive process theory of writing, however, posit that if the major argument of the cognitive theory is the inter-relationship between thought and language, as Vygotsky (1978) had already postulated, then it was natural for two theories of the cognitive theory of writing to merge, that is, an individual process plus a collaborative process should result in Social Constructionist Theory. Hillocks and Smith (1991) state that research has constantly shown that

the teaching of school grammar has little or no effect on students. Relatively, few students learn grammar well, fewer retain it and still fewer transfer the grammar they have learnt to improve or edit their writings. Some researchers, on the other hand, are very optimistic in solving the phenomenon of grammar devolution on social media platforms. Harris (1962) asserts that studying formal grammar is less helpful to writers in social media.

### 3. Online communication

Online communication refers to how people communicate, connect, transact to send, retrieve, or receive information of any kind via the internet using digital media (Billewar et al., 2022). It comprises synchronous and asynchronous computer-mediated communications and reading and writing of online documents via the World Wide Web.

Guldbrandsen and Just (2011) agree that online communication is negotiable and uncontrolled, time-space free, hyper-textual, hyper-public and a two-way mass communication. It cannot be controlled by any single actor, as in most cases where there is little control over access and participation in terms of both the production and reception processes (Galegher et al., 1998; cited in Guldbrandsen & Just, 2011). Moreover, online communication is not dependent on physical or geographical proximity. People from different towns, villages, cities, countries and continents can communicate without any physical contact.

Online communication is also a “one-to-many, but not one-way communication. It is a two-way mass communication” (Napoli, 2010; cited in Guldbrandsen & Just, 2011). This is because when someone communicates online, he is an entity, interacting directly with a minority and indirectly with the majority (Guldbrandsen & Just, 2011).

#### 3.1 Social media

Social media are a collection of internet, websites, services and practices that support collaboration, community building, participation and sharing. Today, young adults and the new generation as a whole use the social media for most of their daily activities unlike the old generation who use television and radio or newspaper for information (Lewis, 2007). Boyd and Ellison (2007) assert that social media was built on the foundation of Web 2.0, which allows individuals to share and connects to others. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) also refer to social media as internet-based applications that build on the foundations of Web 2.0, which allows the creation and exchange of User Generated Content. Stumpel (2010) also states that social media development has given rise to a platform for web-based applications that are characterized by interactivity, collaboration and information sharing.

#### 3.2 Writing

Writing is an unavoidable task in academic. There are many reasons why a student writes Udoh and Usoro (2016). A student writes for the purposes of assignments, research work, and examinations so as to fulfil the academic requirements for the various programmes offered in the various schools and colleges. The researchers, lecturers, educationists, workers and other stakeholders in academia who are more in the publication business write books, articles, pamphlets, which are relevant to the development of students and other. Within a language system, writing relies on many of the same structures as speech, vocabulary, grammar and semantics, with the added dependency of a system of signs or symbols, which is usually in the form of formal alphabet.

There are different stages of writing:

##### 1. Pre-writing Stage

According to Johnson et al. (1989), pre-writing includes all the preliminary things such as planning, researching and outlining, discussing and brainstorming one does before writing. It involves discovering what you know and what needs to be known. This process helps the writer produce the first draft.

##### 2. Drafting Stage

Some scholars refer to this stage as the writing stage. This stage involves putting your ideas into sentences and then into paragraphs. Various ways are explored over here to express ideas and they are written into an initial composition.

Peregoy and Boyle (1997) argue that at this stage, the writer is encouraged to pour his ideas on a paper without paying attention to the perfection in form.

### 3. Revision/Reviewing/Editing Stage

At this stage, the writer takes a closer look at what he has written and checks the expression of his ideas from the readers' point of view. The writer then re-arranges the information and presents it in the most sequential, logical and effective order. Also, at this stage, spelling, punctuation, capitalization, grammar, sentence structure, subject verb agreement, consistent verb tense and word usages are considered by Udoh and Usoro (2016). Adding details and clarifying ideas are all involved in this stage as it presents the final stage in intensive writing.

### 4. Final Draft/Publishing Stage

This is the sharing of the final draft with one another. The edited work was re-copied into a final draft. The motivation here is that corrections would have been made and near perfection work would be finally produced.

### 5. Proofreading Stage

This is the last stage in writing. At this stage, the writer is done with the actual writing. It simply means ensuring that the final document produced is a faithful representation of the original copy (from the brain).

## 3.2.1 Academic writing

Good academic writing should possess some qualities. These qualities mark it out from other form of writing (Udoh & Usoro, 2016). They include:

- Identifying and focusing on a particular issue or idea.
- Presenting an argument clearly and supporting it with relevant evidence.
- Remaining objective and neutral, whatever you are writing about.
- Using the formal variety of English.

Again, academic writing has a peculiar style, which includes:

- The style of academic writing strictly follows the principles in the 5 C's of good writing - Conciseness, Clarity, Completeness, Correctness and Consistence.
- Generally, impersonal and passive expressions are preferred to impersonal and active expressions.
- Opinions are more objective than subjective.
- The use of slang (terminologies used by a group, mostly peers.) and jargon (terminologies used by a group of professionals) is not accepted in academic writings. If they are used, they must be explained.
- Academia use the discipline-specific vocabulary.
- Academia make use of more complex structures.
- Academia hardly accept the contraction of words.

## 3.2.2 Essays/compositions

Most of the academic courses in various schools and colleges use essays or other written tasks to assess students' performance. In the book "Good Writing Guide" written by Opie (2004), an essay is a piece of writing that sets out to analyse a particular situation or idea or puts across a particular point of view, supported by evidence. According to Jaffe et al. (1985), the composition is a brief essay that expresses your thought and feeling, that is, a statement, in which you make your ideas explicit rather than leading your readers to discern them through interpretation. Writing essays takes time and involves careful thoughts and planning. The first task for an essay writer is getting a workable topic on what to write about and in a situation where a topic is already provided, thinking critically on the topic to come up with adequate points to discuss in the essay. Therefore, writing an essay requires good academic writing skills.

## **4. Methodology**

### **4.1 Research design**

This paper explores and examines the effects of social media on students' writing among Senior High School students in the Agona-West Municipality, Ghana. It is a qualitative study, which adopts the descriptive design. It is underpinned by the positivist and post-positivist understanding of the social world and its fact and can be deepened when we try to understand it from the perspective of the people being studied rather than explaining their behaviour through cause and effect (Weber, 1949 as cited in Kusi, 2012).

### **4.2 Population**

This research focuses on Senior High School Three (SHS3) students in the Agona-West Municipality. SHS3 students were selected because most of them are in one social relationship or another and constantly chat with their partners/friends/family via the social media. Moreover, they stand to benefit maximally from the results of this study as they are a certificate class. There are five SHSs in the Agona-West Municipality. Two of them are government-owned schools, while the other three are private-owned schools. Three of the five schools were selected for the study. The selected schools comprised two government schools and one private school. This is because since the youth dominate the SHS, all the schools can be eligible for the study. Table 1 below presents the population for the study.

### **4.3 Sample size and sampling techniques**

The targeted sample size of this study was thirty. This study adopted the purposive sampling technique in the selection the three (3) schools. From the three schools, ten (10) final-year students who have been using the social media were selected using the snowballing technique. Snowballing sampling is a type of sampling, in which the researcher identifies the target population for the study by locating one person who fits the purpose of the study and then uses that person to locate the others. This is used in cases where the target population is not easily available (Ofori & Dampson, 2011).

The researchers in this case identified a student in the final year class who has been using the social media. This student then helped identify other students with the same characteristics. In all, a sample size of 30 SHS3 students - 15 male and 15 female - were selected. The study is limited to 30 students for the manageability of the data.

### **4.4 Methods for data collection**

The researchers visited the selected schools and sought permission from their authorities. With the permission of the authorities of the schools, semi-structured interviews and documents were employed for the data collection.

#### **4.4.1 Semi-structured interview**

The researchers used a semi-structured interview to ascertain the opinion of students on why they use those trends of writing on social media. O'Leary (2005) argues that semi-structured interviews are neither fully fixed nor fully free and are perhaps best seen as flexible. Probes are either pre-stated or posed during the interview, making the interview process flexible. In view of this, Patton (2002) as cited in Owu-Ewie (2006) summarizes this by saying that the semi-structured interview allows the researcher to specify issues and topics to be covered in an outline form. The interviewer can decide the sequence and wording in the course of the interview. Using the semi-structured interview schedule offered the students the opportunity to construct their own words.

#### **4.4.2 Content analysis**

The documents gathered and analysed for the research were the students' 2021/2022 academic year end-of-first-term English examination scripts, essay books and personal journals (Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, TikTok and YouTube chat shots). The researchers created a journal (WhatsApp platform) and requested the selected students to forward snapshots of their chats with their friends to the journal.

**Table 1.** Distribution of the population

School	Status	Number of SHS3 students
Swedru School of Business (SWESBUS)	Government	10
Nyakrom SHS (NYASS)	Government	10
New Era SHS (NESHS)	Private	10

## 5. Results and discussion

### 5.1 Question 1: New trends in writing on social media platforms

The results from the respondents are presented in Table 2 below.

**Table 2.** English words and their corresponding forms/meanings respondents' use on social media sites

English word/expression	Respondents' short form
Because	bos/bcoz
From	4rm/frm
Girl	Gal
Love	Luv
However	Hweva
laugh out loud	LoL
Time	Tym
Like	Lyk
Friend	frnd/phrend
House	haus/huz
Picture	Pic
They	Dey
This	Dis
That	Dat
Good	Gud
Would	wud/wld
Overcome	Ovacm
Bought	Bot
My	Mai
just kidding	Jk
greatest of all times	Goat
Amazing	Lit
hugs and kisses	Xoxo



**Table 3.** English words respondents' blend with Arabic numeral numbers and letters of the alphabet

Word	Blending word
Great	gr8t
<u>N</u> ice	9c
<u>N</u> ight	9t
<u>F</u> orget	4get
<u>F</u> rom	4rm
To/too	2
<u>T</u> ogether	2gether
<u>F</u> orever	4eva/4reva

The underlined items in Table 3 are the letters that are dropped and replaced with Arabic numeral numbers or replaced with another letter in the data. This act automatically produced new spelling. New words are also formulated and new techniques and strategies have been devised for shortening longer words. These have compelled some students to unconsciously write these new spelling in their academic writing.

As to why they write this way on social media sites, a respondent explained that “*In fact, it saves a lot of time and energy*” (The italics was introduced). Another respondent said “It helps me shorten a long word, thereby helping me to write a number of words within a second”. On the question, “Does the way you write (spell words) on social media affect your writing on (spelling) in school work?” most respondents answered in the affirmative - “I always make spelling mistakes, which affect my academic performances”; “Because I am used to typing or writing words in short forms on the social media, I sometimes use these short forms in my school work and even people in authority without knowing”; “In examination, it makes me use a shortcut”. However, a handful of them gave “No” answers and reasons and further explained thus: “Though I write on the social media all the time, I am aware and conscious about the way I write during examinations and normal school work”.

From these respondents, one can deduce that the new trends in writing used on social media platforms affect students spelling in their academic writings. This can be evidently seen in the documents that were used in the study. It was realized in the documents that most of the word’s students write in their school work have a lot of these short forms of spellings. This finding is consonance with Brunner et al.’s (1996) constructivist theory, where students can create/transfer the knowledge and experiences they have into another experience in their learning. The knowledge they have from the social media is vividly seen to be transferred into their academic work.

These new trends in writing corroborate the research conducted by the English Spelling Society in 2012, which reveals that the increasing use of variant spellings on the internet has been brought about by people typing at speed in chat rooms and on social networking sites, where there is a general attitude that there is no need to correct typographical errors or conform to spelling rules.

The underlined letters in Table 4 are the letters that are dropped and replaced with other letters.

Some letters are also intentionally dropped or omitted in order to shorten the time spent in writing them. Examples from the data are shown in the Table 5 below.



**Table 4.** Respondents dropped and replaced letters

Word & dropped letter	Replaced letter
<u>D</u> o	D <u>u</u>
N <u>i</u> ght	N <u>y</u> t
N <u>i</u> ce	N <u>y</u> c
<u>S</u> chool	S <u>k</u> ul
<u>S</u> ometh <u>i</u> ng	S <u>u</u> mtin
<u>N</u> ever	N <u>e</u> va
<u>M</u> oney	M <u>o</u> n <u>i</u>
<u>T</u> hem	<u>D</u> em
<u>G</u> ood	<u>G</u> u <u>d</u>
<u>I</u> s	<u>I</u> z
<u>P</u> hone	<u>F</u> one

**Table 5.** Dropped letters respondents totally omitted/dropped

Words & dropped letters	Short form
<u>G</u> reat	Grt
<u>P</u> lease	Pls
<u>Y</u> ou	U
<u>Y</u> our	Ur
<u>A</u> lready	Alrdy
<u>H</u> ow	Hw
<u>E</u> xplore	Xplore
<u>W</u> hat	Wat
<u>S</u> top	Stp

The underlined letters in Table 5 are the letters, which are completely dropped or omitted.

Another trend in writing on social media sites is the use of abbreviations. Abbreviation is a shortened or contracted form of a word or phrase used in place of a whole. Some phrases are also shortened and used in social media. Here, the first letters of the words are picked and used to form the words. Examples from our data are the phrase “laugh out

loud” shortened as simply “lol” and “hugs and kiss” shortened to “xoxo”. This confirms that spelling on social media is characterized by omitting some vowels in words in order to obtain simple abbreviated words. There is also the elision or dropping of final consonants or consonant clusters. These new trends in writing on social media also confirm what Bovill (2010), chair of the English Spelling Society, stated “Accurate spelling is of the utmost importance, but from this most recent survey, we can conclude that the unprecedented reach and scale of the internet has given rise to new social practices and it is now an agent in spelling change”.

## ***5.2 Question 2: The motivations for the use of social media platforms***

The underlying motive behind this inquiry was to identify whether students were knowledgeable about Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and the social media as a whole. Respondents indicated that they were quite exposed to the use of ICT’s and the social media. As to what motivates them in using the social media sites, an interviewee said “It helps me get more information about what is happening in the world”. Another respondent stated that “It helps me to be connected with both old and new friends”.

These responses affirm what Hew (2011) stated, that the motives of media sites especially Facebook include maintaining existing relationships, meeting new people, having fun, becoming more popular, passing (whiling away) time, expressing or presenting oneself, learning, managing task tool and students’ activism. It was discovered that all the respondents were knowledgeable in the use of social media platforms because all of them answered “Very” to the question: “How knowledgeable are you in Information Communication Technology (ICT)?”

Udoh and Osoro (2016) acknowledge that technological advancement brings in its wake different kinds of activities that people are engaged in on social media. It was realized that most of the respondents started using these platforms for years before even gaining admission to the SHS and this gives them the upper hand on social media sites. Udoh and Osoro (2016) state that learners require background preparation in the form of cognitive structure that provides meaning and organization to experiences and allows the individual to “go beyond the information given”. This means that the students’ previous knowledge on a particular subject matter easily helps them to adapt to their new environment and whatever situation they may find themselves. This adaptation is what Ibok and Ahembe (2016) mean when they emphasize that we are witnessing the effect of linguistic variations on children born into the computer age with such a high level of access in and out of school.

As to which social media sites they mostly use, the interviewees mentioned Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, TikTok and YouTube, giving reasons that they are the most popular and interesting ones. Again, most of the respondents admitted of having one hundred and fifty (150) friends/followers and above on these sites. They said they could log onto the sites at all times at the least opportunity they get and stay on the sites for an hour and more. This corroborates a recent survey in the United States, which indicated that about 90% of young adults, specifically teenagers, have access to the social media or internet and about 75% of these teens, use the internet more than once per day (Kist, 2008; Kugbayi, 2018).

## ***5.3 Question 3: The effects of this phenomenon on students’ writing and their academic performance***

Respondents gave various challenges confronting them. Most of the respondents answered “Yes” to the question “Has there been any change in your academic performance since you started using the social media sites?” In giving further details, one respondent said “Because of the short forms that I use on social media, I do not get good marks during examinations.”; “Because I waste a lot of time on social media, I do not get enough time to read my school notes.”; “Yes, the social media effects my work both at school and at home. It also prevents me from studying my book because the newsfeed and many interesting stories, pictures and videos in it.”

It was also discovered that their engagement in the media, especially WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat and TikTok prevented them from having enough sleep at night. This always makes them sleep during class hours. In response to the question “What are your general impressions and opinions about the use of the social media sites”, respondents answered that the sites have created avenues for people to defraud other people of their valuables. They stated that the sites create a wider space for fraudsters who pretend to be what they are not. They also noted that some people post products on their walls for sale, which are fake products and that it has also created an avenue for people to

post nasty comments and nude pictures/videos.

In general, apart from the negative effect the media has on their academic work, the students are aware of the danger of the sites such as exposure to pornography, fake identity, loss of valuables and even death. But to them, the social media is entertaining and interesting, therefore, they are not ready to stop using the available social media.

## 6. Conclusion

A major theme in the theoretical framework of Bruner is that learning is an active process, in which learners construct new ideas or concepts based on their current/past knowledge. The constructivist framework relies on the learners to be in control of their own acquisition of knowledge and encourages the instructor to serve as a facilitator. Constructivism has limitations, but it can allow for the learner to reach higher planes of knowledge than would be possible otherwise. As children develop, their actions are less constrained by immediate stimuli and that cognitive process mediates the relation between stimulus and response. This implies that learners might maintain the same response in a changing environment or perform different responses in the same environment according to what they consider adaptive. Therefore, in the adaptive world of social media, Jones (2012) emphasizes the fact that we are witnessing the effect of linguistic variations on children born into the computer age with such a high level of access in and out of school.

The study was aimed to explore the effects of social media on students' academic writing in the Agona-West Municipality of the Central Region of Ghana. The study reveals that the common social media sites used by students include Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, TikTok and YouTube. Most respondents use these tools for communication and entertainment. The study also discloses that most of the new spellings on the social media sites are adopted from the trend, which enables them to chat with their friends easily. These new trends of writing affect students spelling in their academic writing and this has resulted in poor grades in their school performances and the long hours they spend in then do not give them enough time to study and do their homework. It also has adverse effects on their health as they keep awake at nights longer than they should. This sleeplessness at night can easily result in bigger and more complicated health problems.

Social media is a welcome development considering the numerous benefits that the various sites have brought to humankind in the advancement of knowledge. We believe that linguists in the English language study have a lot to do to address the issue of English language usage in terms of issue of spelling errors in our school evaluation processes due to the trends used by the social media the better for everyone in the business of the English language study in Africa in general and Ghana in particular.

## Conflict of interest

There is no conflict of interest.

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