

**THE EMERGENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA DISCOURSE AMONG GHANAIAN
UNIVERSITY STUDENTS: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE ACQUISITION OF ACADEMIC
LITERACY**

by

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**Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy in English**

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February, 2017

Declaration

I, Joyce Senya Ama Anku, hereby declare that the thesis for the PhD degree at the University of Venda, hereby submitted by me, has not previously been submitted for a degree at this or any other university, and that it is my own work in design and in execution, and that all reference material contained therein has been duly acknowledged.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Abstract

Language, in general, has always been evolving and dynamic; the same can be said of the English language. Spontaneously, but not unexpected though, since the beginning of this 21st century which saw the introduction of the internet, there have been noteworthy manifestations in the structure and use of varied forms of the English language on social media. This study aimed at exploring, describing and explaining the linguistic features associated with the new communicative order – social media – and their communicative functions, vis-à-vis their impact on Ghanaian university students' acquisition of academic literacy.

To do this, the study adopted a qualitative method and an ethnographic approach in understanding the netnographic realities on social media. In addition, the sociocultural theory and the theory of error analysis served as the philosophical underpinnings which guided the research. Participants of the study (largely undergraduate students) were drawn from two universities in Ghana – the University of Ghana, and Valley View University. The total sample size was one hundred and eighty eight (188).

It was found that frequent and prolonged use of social media discourse does impact negatively on the academic literacy of students. The findings also indicate that social media use overtime becomes addictive and this directly results in limited time span and low attention span of students. Again, the study found that over engagement on social media discourse leads to a general breakdown in both sentence and discourse structure of academic writing resulting into uncontrolled deviant spellings, omission and misuse of punctuation marks and capitalisation, as well as a high level of colloquialism.

Despite these negative influences, it was found that there are some positive potentials of social media that can be harnessed to support academic literacy. The study, thus, recommends that the affordances of social media communication should be retooled to support the teaching and learning of academic literacy.

Key words: Social Media, Media and Discourse, Academic Literacy, University Students, Social Media and English, (toddler) netizens

Dedication

This work is dedicated to:

The memory of my late father, Mr. JFK Anku

My God fearing mother, Mrs Juliana Anku, who never ceases to pray for me

My siblings: Evelyn, Florence, Ernest, Joy, Matilda, Sussy and Sussan

And my lovey husband, Mr Ernest Komla Morkli

Acknowledgement

I give thanks to the Almighty God for his abundant grace on me throughout the many years and seasons until the completion of this work.

Also, I would like to thank my able promoters, Professor EK KLu, Professor GSK Adika and Dr. LMP Mulaudzi for their mentorship and for all the inconvenience they had to endure towards the completion of this work.

Special thanks go to my indefatigable Mother, Mrs Juliana Anku for laying the foundation for my education and for her words of encouragement.

My heartfelt appreciation goes to my husband, Mr. Ernest Komla Morkli for the love and incomparable support given me throughout this period.

Finally, my thank goes to all my siblings and friends for their prayers and words of encouragement as well as all others who have helped in diverse ways towards the realisation of this dream.

To all I say, 'May God richly bless you'.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background of the study

In the course of human communication, there have been scores of exigencies which led to varied degrees of dynamism in language usage. Dynamism in language usage in itself may be as a result of negotiating, establishing and maintaining ‘relationships within and between constantly changing societies (or broadly speaking cultures)’ (Meyer & Fruhwirth, 2005, p. 247). For example, the emergence of the print media in the 15th Century came with its associated merits like the increase in and widespread of literacy as well as demerits like the loss of minority dialects and inconsistencies in printed texts (Crystal, 2006; 1995).

Likewise in the 19th Century, the introduction of the telegraph and telephone sparked considerable debate from all spheres, and specifically in education, as the telegraph’s linguistic consequences – the use of content words, truncated syntax, etc. – were phenomenal (Wozniaki, 2015). Then came the mass media (radio and later television) which over the years have been associated with widespread dissemination of information, both favourable and unfavourable. Yet another phenomenon worth considering in the late 20th Century is the invention of mobile telephony which came with the introduction of the Global System of Mobile Communication (GSM) service with its associated text messaging language (Faleke & Ibrahim, 2011). Now in the 21st Century, the invention of the computer and the Internet has given birth to several new communicative affordances. All these accounts attest to the inalienable relation between language and technology.

Although each of the technologies described above came with certain linguistic peculiarities, the impact of each on language, human communication and academic discourse varies. For instance, it took radio 38 years and television 13 years to reach 50 million users globally (though the impact of the mass media, specifically radio and

television, was regarded as great at the time of inception); whereas, it took the Internet four years to also reach 50 million users globally (Qualman, 2015).

The Internet as a communicative tool has come with several associated platforms commonly known as social media networks or social media platforms. Social media is therefore an interactive platform that enables participants to create, consume and disseminate information (Crystal, 2006). Taprial and Kanwar (2012) have argued that the present day understanding of the concept, social media, is usually restricted to social network sites such as Facebook, Tweeter, Myspace, etc. Contrary to this understanding of the concept, Taprial and Kanwar reason that social media ‘encompasses all the services that facilitate creation, sharing and exchange of user generated content. These include but are not restricted to Internet forums, groups, blogs, microblogs, networking sites, social bookmarking sites, wikis, podcasts, content communities for articles, video/photo sharing sites, Q & A sites, review sites, etc.’ (p. 6).

Though this study concurs with Taprial and Kanwar’s (2012) conceptualisation of social media, the use of the term social media is restricted to social networking sites, such as Facebook, Tweeter, WhatsApp, etc commonly engaged by Ghanaian university students. Consequently, this study defines a social networking site, and by extension social media, as a ‘social’ discourse community largely characterised by conventional practices – evident in the choice of linguistic and paralinguistic features – which aim at promoting interactionism.

Social media participation and involvement is largely cross generational (Napoli, 2014; Corey, 2013; DeAngelis, 2013; Hjorth & Arnold, 2012); this means that both the young and old are engaged in social media discourse either intra-generationally or inter-generationally. That notwithstanding, several studies (McGillivray, 2014; Etheridge, 2012; Shewmaker, 2012; Crystal, 2008) have established the fact that the youth, majority of whom are college or university students constitute the most dominant group or users on social media and can therefore be described as citizens of the net or ‘netizens’ (Crystal,

2006). Also, Godwin-Jones (2008) found that 86% of college/university students go online daily, and as high as 59% of the time is spent on social media.

A pilot study I conducted on students' engagements on social media involving some tertiary students revealed that a larger proportion of students' time is spent interacting with friends and loved ones on social media. Thus, very little time is spent on practices and vocabulary choices needed for effective academic communication. Indeed, most of the students I interacted with seemed 'hypnotised' and deeply immersed in this new interactive platform such that the seriousness they ought to attach to academic writing as a formal genre is often compromised. Thus, students' academic essays (written assignments and other related works) are often characterised by avoidable errors. Godwin-Jones (2008) also made this observation when he indicated that students who excessively rely on informal conversations on the internet have 'the potential to find means to link informal and recreational writing with academic writing' (p. 7). This merger of recreational language with academic writing may impede students' academic development and success as the acquisition of academic literacy skills may be compromised.

Though there may be other factors impacting positively or negatively on university students' acquisition of academic literacy, social media is emphasised here because of its almost immediate, spontaneous and wider coverage which is evident more in written discourse than in its counterpart, spoken discourse. Needless to say, social media has the potential to give more currency to an existing academic phenomenon.

1.1 Statement of the problem

The inevitability of social media discourse in the 21st Century cannot be gainsaid, as it serves as a valuable communicative tool; among other things, it is convenient, economical, and fast. For instance, compared to traditional forms of communication, monetary commitment associated with social media mediated interaction is negligible. Unfortunately, this cost effectiveness leads to excessive use and sometimes abuse of

social media platforms especially by the youth (majority of whom are college or university students). As an instance, about 75% of the youth have their profile on at least one social media platform while about 68% are reported to text daily and by this statistics are becoming more or less 'digital natives' of the internet and social media (FitzGerald, 2012). Similar studies have shown that, generally, over indulgence in social media practices has certain negative effects on the development of the social, the cognitive, as well as the communication skills of users (Lyddy, et al., 2014; McGillivray, 2014). What must however be established is that due to the level of convenience users of social media enjoy, the youth, especially, become easily addicted to it, thus, paying little or no attention to other equally important areas of life, such as academics. This over indulgence on social media may have adverse effects on the acquisition of academic literacy skills owing to lack of time and needed commitment to academic work on the part of student users.

As a 'seemingly established' communicative order, which is also a product of technological advancement, social media discourse is characterised by certain unique linguistic conventions. These include the use of truncated syntax, certain spelling conventions, among others, which are not necessarily in harmony with other types of discourse, especially, academic discourse. This is however not entirely a new phenomenon as similar features can be identified with older forms of communication, like the telegram and GSM. The introduction of these linguistic features need not be curtailed so long as their usage is restricted to their rightful communicative domain. This is however not the case as traces of social media linguistic practices are beginning to creep into academic communication.

For example, in recent years, the chief examiners' report on the West African Senior Secondary School Certificate Examinations (WASSSCE) have attributed the persistent decline in performance in almost all subject areas to the candidates' poor command over the English language. This is evident in poor grammatical constructions, unconventional orthography, truncated sentences, among other related language errors. What is worth noting, however, is the chief examiners' reports (2014, 2012, 2011, 2010) alluding the

poor trend to the candidates' use of social media language, among other factors, in answering questions.

I see this as a problem against the backdrop that the majority of these candidates will eventually be admitted into the country's universities, the highest institutions of learning, saddled with this 'linguistic baggage' since it could not have been avoided at the WASSSCE level. This instance thus has the potential to impede the smooth transition and integration of these Senior High School graduates into the academic discourse community.

In addition, a glance through students' academic essays reveals several deviant usages ranging from grammar to structure; some of which are new usages entering into the language. This is largely due to the fact that a form of language that is supposed to be the preserve of certain communicative domains, predominantly informal, is creeping into academic writing.

While one cannot rule out the positive contributions this new communicative order – social media – brings to the discussion table as far as the dynamics of language use are concerned, there is evidence that this creative use of language is crossing its thresholds and fast gaining root in academic communication – a formal context. What requires enquiry, however, are the implications of this phenomenon; that is, the emergence of social media discourse among Ghanaian university students and its effects on their acquisition of academic literacy – a research gap that needs to be filled. It is therefore important to describe and interpret the implications of Ghanaian university students' social media linguistic behaviour and their acquisition of academic literacy.

1.2 Objectives

The main objective of the study is to examine the implications of language as used in social media by Ghanaian university students for their acquisition of academic literacy. The specific objectives are as follows:

1. To explore the nature of Ghanaian university students' linguistic practices on social media.
2. To understand the unique experiences Ghanaian university students' have gained through their interaction on social media.
3. To establish the extent to which language use on social media affects the acquisition of academic literacy skills of Ghanaian university students.
4. To propose guidelines that will explore the potential role of social media in advancing Ghanaian university students' academic literacy.

1.3 Research Questions

The main research question of the study is 'What implications does language use on social media by Ghanaian university students have on their acquisition of academic literacy?' The specific questions are as follows:

- 1 What is the nature of Ghanaian university students' linguistic practices on social media?
- 2 What unique experiences have Ghanaian university students gained through their interaction on social media?
- 3 To what extent does language use in social media by Ghanaian university students affect their acquisition of academic literacy skills?
- 4 How can social media be used as an assistive pedagogical tool in advancing Ghanaian university students' acquisition of academic literacy?

1.4 Justification for the study

Unlike in the olden days, prior to the dawn of the 21st Century where the greatest medium of communication was largely face-to-face or through mass communication, presently the medium of communication is to a greater extent digital. For instance, in Africa alone, there were 50,386,760 users on Facebook (a social media site) as at March 2013 compared to 25, 500,000 in 2010 and about 41,000 posts are shared every second. This indicates that the trend in communication is gradually changing from face-to-face interaction to

computer-mediated communication. In addition to this data on Facebook, there are numerous social media sites in Ghana that have received equal patronage over the years. As Wellman and Haythornthwaite (2002) aptly observed, 'ignoring the internet is as huge a mistake as seeing it as a savior is. It is the boringness and routineness that makes the internet important because this means that it is being pervasively incorporated into people's lives' (p. 7).

Also, since the English language, being the primary medium of communication in Ghana, is also the language which is predominantly used in the social media in Ghana, it is imperative to understand what it is used for, how it is used and if its new domain of usage has any implications on university students' acquisition of academic literacy in Ghana; and if need be, re-structure traditional domains like education to meet the growing trend in communication since communication is the driving force of education.

Accordingly, in order to keep pace with the changing phase of communication in the 21st Century, we cannot ignore the linguistic phenomena taking place on social media since students' contact hours with the social networks far exceeds their contact hours with English teachers or the classroom; meanwhile, the tendency of transfer of linguistic elements from the social media to other genres, like academic discourse, is high.

Although there is a growing number of empirical studies on language and the social media, most of the studies border on perception and attitude of learners, teachers, and other stakeholders on the use of social media in foreign language teaching and learning, identity construction, as well as the effects of certain conventions in social media on literacy, language and society (Clark & Gruba, 2010; McBride, 2009; Blattner & Fiori, 2009; 2011; Crystal, 2006; 2008). Despite these efforts, the ever increasing, vibrant use of language, especially English, in the social media in Ghana and its implications on the acquisition of academic literacy among Ghanaian university students is yet to receive the attention it deserves.

Thus, in line with the research's objectives to investigate the implications of language as used in the social media on Ghanaian university students' acquisition of academic literacy, the findings of this study will be of immense benefit to three categories of people: students, teachers, and third party stakeholders (which include policy makers, parents, language experts, academics, among others).

First of all, students will be aware of the different communicative domains they find themselves in and the acceptable mode of communication of each as well as the consequences of 'contextual misappropriations'. Second, English teachers, at all levels, will be urged not to separate the teaching of 'structure' from 'function'. In other words, communicative competence should complement the teaching of linguistic competence. Finally, the findings of this study will be a guide to other stakeholders in formulating policies for the education sector; for instance, in designing curriculum and educative materials.

1.5 Assumptions underpinning the study

The study operates on the following assumptions:

- Social media discourse has the tendency of over-running the standard and formal language, if due diligence is not followed.
- University students as social interactants who are not acquainted with the formal-informal divide with regard to communicative contexts will inevitably blend social media discourse with academic communication.

1.6 Delimitation of the study

Even though the study proposes to engage university students in Ghana, it however, focuses on only first year Ghanaian University students from two universities – one public and one private. The study operates on the premise that these first year university students, prior to their admission into the university, had engaged and continue to engage in social media discourse thus may have acquired peculiar linguistic practices

uncharacteristic of formal language use at the university. Therefore, there is the need for them to be introduced to some interventionist programmes so as to get them enculturated into academic literacy in order to ensure their smooth transition into the academic discourse community.

1.7 Literature Review: A vignette

Blattner and Lomicka (2012) investigated students' attitudes with regard to the integration of Facebook as a learning tool in the foreign language classroom. Their findings revealed that being the first-time of using Facebook in a formal context, the learners were initially sceptical about the idea, but they eventually appreciated the educational use of Facebook in acquiring the socio-pragmatic competences of a foreign language. Battner and Lomicka thus encouraged the use of social network sites in the teaching and learning of foreign languages.

Similarly, several studies (Selfe, 2010; Yancey, 2004; Duffelmeyer, 2002) on the pedagogical implications of the new media seem to focus on how educators can imbibe the new technologies into the classroom to enable learners acquire new ways and habits of learning in a fast changing world. Most of these studies seem to be based in the Western and Eastern worlds. However, the trend in Africa, and to be specific Ghana, is different. The call for the use of this new technology in the teaching and learning process has not yet gained much recognition; that notwithstanding, students at all levels as well as some academics engage this platform for their private communication and relaxation.

Perhaps one of the ground breaking studies on language use in the social media is by David Crystal. Crystal (2008) in his thought provoking book, 'Txtng: The Gr8 db8', adopted an optimistic approach to linguistic conventions in internet communication. He however focused on only one aspect of the several conventions, which is 'texting'. He tried to convince all concerned that if there is any fall in the standard of a language it cannot and must not be blamed on the texting phenomenon since a texter's ability to engage in texting is as a result of his/her adequate knowledge of the intricacies of the

language in consideration. While one may agree with Crystal's observation, it is important to point out that almost all the data on texting analysed by Crystal came from native speakers of the language(s) under discussion and in such a situation, the texters might have been exposed to the spelling system of the language early (and thus can be said to have developed enough skills as far as spelling and word meaning are concerned). The discussion however becomes blurred in a foreign language or second language context where the speaker (learner) is still battling to acquire the basic skills in spelling. The situation here differs from Crystal's in the sense that what is texted by the majority here does not come out of their own intuitiveness, but rather a direct copy from what others have done over the years (largely from the foreign media) which is often unintelligible to people outside that group or community of practice.

Like Crystal, a number of studies have focused on texting as a means of computer mediated communication largely through the medium of mobile telephony. Some of these studies include Lyddy et al. (2014), Tagg (2009) and Spilioti (2006). Spilioti (2006) for instance explored "text messages both as individual texts and as contributions to longer interactional sequences" (p. 18). Her primary area was discourse analysis thus she embraced the notion of genre as a unit of analysis in accounting for the structural patterns present in her data. Focussing on 'language use in text messaging', Spilioti noted that "text messaging allows for instant, text-based interaction, among physical non co-present individuals" (p. 17). Her study of text messaging is restricted to 'mobile telephony' for mobile communication. She explored issues of language and social interaction in text-messaging. Her data came from 'everyday exchanges of text messages among urban youth in Athens, Greece and three case studies. She did not only look at what participants have said but their 'relationship' with one another as well as their 'interactional history'.

Data collection techniques used by Spilioti were questionnaire survey and case study. In all, she gathered 447 text messages. Following Thurlow's (2003) technique of gathering data from text messages, Spilioti asked a group of students to transcribe both their incoming and outgoing text messages verbatim, devoid of all additions and

subtractions. The participants were also asked to include the senders' age and gender of received messages. Such technique though may elicit authentic data has its short falls.

For instance, participants may fail in recording accurately all the information on the mobile phone which is contrary to observing the respondents in their natural environment, their thought processes, etc. Also, the participants may not remember all senders' biographic information, such as age, thus provide inaccurate information. Though Spilioti proposed to observe language use in text messages, she focused more on the nature of the message itself and factors that may account for it; that is, on contextual/pragmatic tendencies that account for the nature of text messages rather than on distinctive/individual/physical linguistic items that compose a message. In addition, Spilioti's data was based on Greek and not English, it can therefore be understood that her data was based on the general nature of text message composition in Greek accounting for the interactional history as a framework in understanding why certain choices are made by the respondents.

Also, Lyddy et al. (2014) analysed the 'textual characteristics' of text messages in English among university students in Ireland. Their areas of concern include message length, non-standard spelling, sender and message characteristics and word frequency. They found out that 25% of word content was non-standard with the omission of capital letters being the prevalent. It is observed that Lyddy et al. organised their study based on a list of predetermined factors/parameters. Such methodology is result-oriented as far as the prescription of variables to look out for is concerned so that one's attention can be focussed on fewer variables for in-depth analysis; nonetheless, such practices fear overlooking certain key phenomena that naturally occur in the course of data collection and analysis. Consequently, a study that predominantly observes and describes the occurrences of university students' linguistic choices on social media sites is able to account for the totality of linguistic choices in the social media.

Similar to the above mentioned studies on texting, Tagg (2009) conducted a corpus linguistics enquiry into SMS text messaging. She focused on the creativity exhibited in spelling, a major component of texting. Thus, doing a word frequency analysis of texting Tagg was able to categorise spelling variants according to 'form and function'. Consequently, Tagg (2009) has established a strong relationship between texting as a genre and speech and concluded "that texters perform brevity, speech-like informality and group deviance in construing identities through Txt" (p. ii). Drawing participants from a broader spectrum covering all professions (general public), Tagg's data covers a record breaking total of 11, 067 text messages, the largest ever conducted in the field of text messaging (compared to previous studies: Thurlow's (2006)- 554 text messages; Hard af Segerstad's (2002) - 1152 text messages).

Tagg's participants were all native speakers within the age bracket of 19-69. Her focus was mainly on the description of the phenomenon at hand; thus, she did not touch on the pedagogical implications of her findings so as to suggest interventions for effective and efficient acquisition of academic literacy. Therefore, since the youth (the majority who are university students) represent the vibrant bracket of texters (Thurlow, 2003; Kasesniemi & Rautiainen, 2002), there remains a gap of knowledge, especially from English as a Second Language point of view, as regards the relationship between the kind of language use in the virtual world vis-à-vis university students' effective acquisition of academic literacy. This is the gap this study attempts to fill.

Of equal importance, though not on the language of texting, is Sekiguchi's (2012) study on the promotion of twitter as a social learning environment to support Japanese EFL students' Self-Regulated Learning (SRL). Sekiguchi (2012) investigates the possibility of integrating social media in and outside the classroom to support learning outcomes and attitudes. Sekiguchi's main concern was to investigate how time spent on social media by students, among other factors, can be redirected to assist in SRL. The findings indicated that the participants' improvement in language proficiency, acquisition of time management skills, and the cultivation of a spirit of 'healthy and friendly rivalry' serve as enough motivation for self-regulated learning. Again, it is important to note that Sekiguchi

concentrates on how social media can help in acquiring new language skills and not on the effects (positive or negative) existing linguistic practices on social media platforms have on the structure of already acquired or yet to be acquired linguistic competence so as to prescribe or suggest interventions for those specific areas of deficiency.

A number of researchers have underscored the declining nature of academic communication in Ghanaian Universities, especially, and the world at large. Some of these researchers who have over the years made ardent attempts to identify the causes of poor academic communication skills of university students in Ghana include Agor (2010), Omari (2010), Arhin (2009), Gogovi (1997; 2001), Adam (1997), Dako (1997), Morgan (1994), Adika and Owusu-Sekyere (1997), Yankson (1989).

Yankson's (1989) study reveals that concord is a major problem facing English writing among second-language learners, in not only Ghanaian universities but also in Nigerian universities. He observed that

The noun-verb agreement, for example, is very basic in an English sentence and it is, therefore, taught at a very early age – in the primary school. So for this type of error to persist, for instance, in the interlanguage of the university undergraduate and many highly educated Ghanaians should be of great concern to the English language teacher (p.xi).

But like many other researchers, Yankson's scope covers the identification of the problem but failed to link it to any identifiable source, suggestive of a known problem without a cause or with an unknown cause. The result is, we are aware of a problem without knowing the cause or source of it. In essence, there is little that the language teacher can do in remedy of the problem. Like Yankson, Morgan (1994) also analyses English language errors of first year Ghanaian university student's examination scripts. His findings project concord errors out of ten common errors as the major problem facing Ghanaian university students. She thus calls on English teachers to pay particular attention to how some of these language areas are handled in schools.

Adika and Owusu-Sekyere's (1997) investigation on language problems of students reveals students' inability to use words correctly and also to spell words correctly. They cite some examples from students' essays as using 'order' in place of 'other', 'turn' for 'tend', and 'comparisom' for 'comparison', etc. Clearly, a glance through the social media sites confirms this phenomenon. Words are not only misspelt but are also used in the wrong context with no knowledge of the writers, who are mostly students. Not only that, some students' essays I sampled also confirmed Adika and Owusu-Sekyere's study.

Also, Dako (1997) discusses some aspects of language competences as contained in examination scripts of final year literature students of the Department of English, University of Ghana. She observes that

'...a graduate in English at the University of Ghana exhibits linguistic insecurity, reflected in limited structural diversity, inadequate vocabulary variation and use'(p. 274).

Dako, however, goes further to suggest some causes of this menace. She indicates that it can be attributed to lack of effective and efficient mentoring and practice. She calls for a more enhanced way of teaching writing skills in Ghanaian universities.

Furthermore, Arhin (2009) investigates the effects of spoken language and its strategies on academic writing. Her study discovered that the linguistic and cultural background of students, coupled with the spoken language and oral rhetorical pattern have an impact on students' writings. In other words, most students fail to identify the different domains of spoken and written discourses, thus they end up writing in the same manner as they speak. Arhin attributes this socio-cultural dimension of writing on the domineering oral culture of Ghanaians.

Agor (2010) investigates English writing inadequacies of university students in Ghana and reports that many university students lack basic English writing skills such as knowledge in concord rules, misplaced modification, dangling modification, etc. In

prescribing an antidote to the problem, he suggests an independent variable dubbed 'Relevant Remedial Contents' (RRC) instruction model in the teaching of English writing. According to Agor (2010), "Relevant Remedial Contents refers to a cluster of topics in English writing that constitute the current writing needs of our university students" (p. 84).

In Agor's study, entry behaviour tests are conducted on the first day of meeting the writing class. Then students are requested to exchange their work-sheets and mark them as the researcher provides the appropriate responses. The marked scripts are then given back to the respective owners. Time is then given to the students to ponder over the enormity of their own inadequacies. They are then asked to suggest specific problem areas that pertain to them. In this way topics suggested by the students will be a true reflection of their specific problem areas. These problem areas are then structured into the syllabus which will accordingly form the basis for that course for the semester.

As evident in the above discussion, the problems associated with Ghanaian university students as second language learners of English are enormous, which may have implications on their acquisition of the needed academic literacy. This study argues that, due to its pervasive nature, social media has lent more currency to the existing problem. It is therefore important to investigate the implications of Ghanaian university students' engagement in social media discourse on their acquisition of academic literacy.

1.8 Theoretical Framework

The study is guided by two theories. The first theory the study adopts is the Socio-cultural theory of second language learning and acquisition spearheaded by Lev Vygotsky. This theory served as the main framework of the study to account for peculiarities of participants' social media interactions as well as served as the basis for a proposed pedagogical model which aims at an effective and efficient acquisition of academic literacy among second language speakers of English. In addition to this theory, the theory of error analysis was adopted to account for participants' errors evident in their academic

communication. This theory attempted a classification of errors found in samples of the students' academic writing so as to ascertain errors that have a direct correlation with students' linguistic choices in social media discourse.

1.8.1 Sociocultural Theory: An overview

The Sociocultural Theory (hereafter SCT) stems largely from the works of the Russian psychologist and teacher, Lev Vygotsky and his colleagues. Vygotsky believes that 'social structures influence socio-cognitive activities' (Lamy & Hampel, 2007, p. 26). Vygotsky's theory came at a time when psychologists were making ardent attempts to account for what constitutes or influences human behaviour. Vygotsky based his theory on the understanding/conviction that 'human activities take place in cultural contexts, are mediated by language and other symbol systems, and can be best understood when investigated in their historical development' (Johnson-Steiner & Mahn, 1996).

Further, based on the argument that 'the individual [for that matter, learner] is a social being', and 'emerges from social interaction', Vygotsky develops a principle which is predominantly motivated by social interaction. This principle states that at the initial stage of engaging in an activity, learners depend on experienced members of their immediate environment who serve as mentors, an act of 'guided participation' (Rogoff, 1990), and gradually recline to a state of autonomy with the passage of time (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

As a theory of mediated mental development, SCT's focus is on 'communication', 'cognition' as well as 'meaning' and projects these three over formalist tenets that project structure (Lantolf & Thorne, 2005). According to Lantolf (1994), "despite the label 'sociocultural' the theory is not a theory of the social or of the cultural aspects of human existence. ... it is, rather, ... a theory of mind... that recognizes the central role that social relationships and culturally constructed artifacts play in organizing uniquely human forms of thinking" (p. 1).

Also, to Block (2003), the SCT is ‘a broader socio-cultural model’ which promises to account for ‘some of the less easily defined characteristics of communication (p.4); to achieve this, the theory ‘focuses on interaction and social aspects of learning’ as it ‘attempts to reconcile the analysis of psychological processes with the fact that individuals are ‘situated’ in social, institutional and cultural settings’ (Lamy & Hampel, 2007, p. 23-24), which is to say that the sociocultural setting cannot be alienated from the individual’s cognitive as well as linguistic performances.

1.8.2 Major tenets of the sociocultural theory

From its inception to the present, the sociocultural theory has undergone some level of moderation. The following concepts, thus, are associated with it and underpin its relevance as a theory of language acquisition and learning. They are mediation, Zone of Proximal Distance, Scaffolding, and Self-regulation.

1.8.2.1 Mediation

Mediation, according to Lantolf (1994), is ‘understood to be the introduction of an auxiliary device into an activity that then links humans to the world of objects or to the world of mental behaviour. Lantolf continued by saying that just as physical entities such as hammer, machete aid humans in carrying out their physical activities, so do the ‘symbolic tools’ aid humans to attempt and demonstrate mastery over such higher order psychological activities like problem-solving, memorisation, repetition, etc. Mediation therefore can be both physical and psychological.

Accordingly, Vygotsky believes that individual learners possess psychological tools which help direct and control both their mental and physical behaviour. These psychological tools are also known as mediators, with examples being language, technology (Haas, 1996), as well as individuals who are instrumental in improving learning ‘by selecting and shaping the learning experiences presented to them (William & Burden, 2009).

Following from this understanding, Lantolf (2000) identifies three domains of mediation relevant in the second language learning context. These are:

1. Social mediation: mediation by others in social interaction, eg. mediation through experts or peers
2. Self-mediation: mediation by the self through private speech.
3. Artefact mediation: by language, but also by portfolios, tasks and technology.

It has been observed that, as a common practice, mediation involving human mediators/participants is usually done with the knowledge and, often, some level of consent of the mediators but on social media, mediation takes place indirectly and unconventionally. That is to say, human mediators perform indirect mediation. Another observation is that in social media interactions there are usually three types of mediators: language, technology and participants/co-interactants. As stated above, often, the human agents, in this case participants, are oblivious of their important role as mediators during social interactions.

In addition, preliminary findings reveal that auto-correct/suggestive texts (which can be classified under language) are a source of mediation for the language learner and they have both positive and negative influences on the user. In positive terms, they assist the user involved in the communicative act by easing the mental strain of memorising all those words; it is also a time saving mechanism as the user is engaged in less physical stress. Negative wise, over dependence on suggestive texts makes the human mind to become lazy, resulting in the user's inability to remember correctly the spelling of certain words in offline communication which manifests as deviant usages in academic communication.

1.8.2.2 Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

According to Vygotsky, the ZPD is '...the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more

capable peers.’ (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). Also, Mitchell and Myles (2004) assert that the ZPD is ‘the domain of knowledge or skills where the learner is not yet capable of independent functioning, but can achieve the desired outcome given relevant scaffolded help’ (p. 196). Similarly, Harvard (1997) conceptualises the ZPD as ‘the distance between the child’s independent capacity and the capacity to perform with assistance’ (p. 40). Such assistance may come from the learners, parents, teachers, caretakers, and even peers in the form of modelling, observation and or feedback (Kao, 2010).

From the above definitions, the zone of proximal development may be understood as the distance between what the learner knows and what he is yet to know. This knowledge gap may involve the learner’s present capabilities and skills attained through mediation by various mediators before attaining independency or self-regulation (Donato, 1994).

What is imperative however is that linguists ought to be able to measure the degree/level/extent of this distance to know how much the learner knows or how far or near the learner is from the expected outcome or set of abilities/skills (or better still to know the extent of the learner’s coverage of the expected outcome). In determining this, the following factors must be considered:

- The learner’s age, aspirations, current competent level, expected level, purpose / result of mediation, learner’s psychological and cognitive make up or performance, and social, cultural and political affiliation or attachment;
- The availability of mediator(s) and Knowledge / exposure of mediator(s); as well as
- Willingness on the part of both learner and mediator(s) to allow the process of mediation to take place.

These factors will guide ‘human mediators’ involved in social mediation to provide just the needed mediation.

1.8.3 Error Analysis

Error Analysis (hereafter EA) as a linguistic field of enquiry is attributed to S. P. Corder and his colleagues (in the 1960s). The theory was propounded to complement the inadequacies of the contrastive analysis theory, a second language acquisition theory which explores irregularities in a learner's target language output through the interference of the learner's first language (Karra, 2006).

Error analysis is a method used to account for the systematic errors that are associated with language learning (CARLA, 2014). It may also be said to be 'the process of determining the incidence, nature, causes and consequences of unsuccessful language' (Yang, 2010). Though its main aim is to identify the cause(s) of learner errors, it does not regard the first language as a starting point or sole cause of learner errors, as does the contrastive analysis. Thus, it covers a broader scope of identifying the possible causes of learner errors and also attempts a taxonomy of the errors identified.

Corder (1967) identified three usefulness of errors and, as a matter of fact, error analysis. According to him, errors are helpful:

- to the teacher: they show a student's progress;
- to the researcher: they show how a language is acquired, what strategies the learner uses;
- to the learner: he or she can learn from these errors.

1.8.3.1 Taxonomy of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) errors

Classification of errors has received much attention in the literature on error analysis as different researchers have tried to classify the various types of errors committed by second language learners over the years. Most of these stemmed from a point of view of refuting existing ones; this, however, makes the sub-field somehow elusive. Scholars (such as Bataineh, 2005; James, 1998; Stenson, 1978; Fries, 1949; Dulay & Burt, 1974; Richards, 1971; Lado, 1957, among others) have all attempted a classification of errors.

Nevertheless, there is general acceptability over these four concepts as sources of second language acquisition and learning errors: interlingual, intralingual, communication-strategy and induced (Yang, 2010).

None of these earlier scholars, however, has considered errors caused by (over) dependency on technology. This study is of the view that certain errors evident in this present era may be mediated by technology.

1.9 Methodology: An overview

The study is guided by the qualitative paradigm. The qualitative paradigm is an “anti-positivistic, interpretative approach; it is idiographic, thus holistic in nature and [its] main aim is to understand social life and the meaning that people attach to everyday life” (Schurink, 1998, p. 241). As a result, the qualitative paradigm is projected through inductive reasoning. Also, it is explanatory and exploratory in nature, and, as such, context based (Neuman, 1994; Wolcott, 1994).

Within the qualitative paradigm are situated different procedural rules that outline and control the kind of data to collect, the process of data collection as well as the method of data analysis. Some of such procedural rules or methods under the qualitative paradigm include Ethnography, Phenomenology and ethnomethodology, The historical method, Applied and action research, Clinical methods , Symbolic interaction, and Grounded theory (Schurink, 1998).

This study, however, has adopted an ethnographic method as its primary fieldwork technique. Ethnography is a term used to study the culture of a group of people who reside in their natural environments. An ethnographic study reveals the ‘what’ and ‘how’ of subjects’ behaviour in their real-world. Such kind of study provides ‘rich’ and ‘thick’ descriptions on the subjects (Stanley, 1990).

As a result of the ethnographic nature of the study, the approach to understanding the object of study is exploratory, descriptive as well as explanatory. It is descriptive in the sense that the study presents a detailed analysis of the occurrences in social media by the Ghanaian university students. It is also exploratory since social media discourse is an emerging phenomenon; thus the study aims at exploring the new phenomenon so as to describe and explain its boundaries. These are discussed subsequently in chapter 4. But since the study is based on-line rather than off-line, an online equivalent of the off-line ethnography was adopted. This goes to suggest that traditional ethnography was primarily designed and used extensively for off-line studies. But in the 21st Century there has been a revolution in the nature of data and data sources, resulting in almost borderless boundaries for research. In essence, there is a changing research landscape where the virtual community provides the affordances to extend research enquiries online.

Several terminologies have been proposed to identify, describe, and put into perspective on-line replica of off-line research enquiries. Notable among them include 'Virtual Ethnography' (Crichton & Kinash, 2003, Hine, 2000), 'Internet Ethnography' (Sade-Beck, 2004; Miller & Slater, 2000), 'Social Media Ethnography' (Postill & Pink, 2012), 'Cyber Ethnography' (Rybas & Gajjala, 2007; Keeley-Browne, 2011; Akturan, 2009), 'Webethnography' (Prior & Miller, 2012)

These terminologies aim at reflecting participants' cultural practices online. The study adopts 'netnography' as coined by Robert Kozinets. Kozinets (2010) has proposed the term, 'netnography' to reflect the specific domain of online ethnographic study. 'Netnography' is coined by blending the words "internet" and "ethnography". It is an adaptation from the traditional ethnographic framework to suit the 'complexities' of internet or technologically based communication or interaction. Netnography which one may also refer to as online ethnography share similar characteristics with off-line ethnographic study. The difference between these two types of ethnography, however, is that netnography is based solely on the practices of the virtual community. Accordingly, the study was netnographic in nature.

1.9.1 Population and sample size

The research participants in this study are tertiary students drawn from two top universities in Ghana: the University of Ghana (public) and Valley View University (private). Purposive sampling technique was employed for the selection of the sample for the study.

Purposive sampling features in situations where an expert uses his or her judgement in deciding on research cases for a specific reason (Neuman, 2007). The purposive sampling technique helped in selecting only participants who are in the first year of study and undertaking a general academic literacy programme.

The general academic literacy programme is usually a university required course rolled out by the respective universities, to equip freshmen and women with the necessary academic communication skills that will enable them succeed in their new academic environment. Accordingly, the constitution of these classes permeates all academic fields or disciplines run by the two universities.

In all, a well representative sample size of 188 participants participated in the study. Considering the qualitative and netnographic nature of the current study, the sample size of 188 participants is adequate enough to provide the necessary information such is required for a satisfactory discussion and understanding of the research questions and objectives.

1.9.2 Investigative tools

The main tool of investigation was participant observation. This was supported by questionnaires, field notes and key-informant interviews (See section 3.8).

1.9.3 The data

The study has adopted an eclectic approach in collecting data. In all, three categories of data were obtained for analysis and discussion.

The first category of data came from participants' interactions (chats) on a common social media site prevalent in Ghana: WhatsApp.

In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted on a selected number of the participants from the two universities proposed in the study (eight (8) from each university). The semi-structured, face-to-face interviews helped consolidate the findings that emerged from the research participants' social media chats.

Furthermore, the study also sampled academic writing genres: class assignments from the participants. The essence of this is to ascertain the extent of possible influence of social media discourse on students' acquisition of academic literacy.

1.10 Organisation of the study

This study is organized in seven chapters

Chapter One presents a general introduction which involves background to the study, statement of problem, aims and objectives, research questions, relevance and justification, and assumption, theoretical framework, overview of literature review and methodology, and the organisation of the study .

In Chapter Two, current literature on the emergence of social media discourse and the acquisition of academic literacy was extensively reviewed. The chapter is further divided into three sections. The first section reviewed existing literature on social media

discourse, from both Western and Non-Western perspectives, as well as the usefulness and implications of social media on Ghanaian university students' academic literacy.

Chapter Three presents extensive literature on academic literacy.

Chapter Four focuses on the methodology which covers the research approach and design, data collection procedures, population and data sampling techniques as well as ways of analysing the data.

Chapter Five, on the other hand, thoroughly analyses and discusses findings of the study in support of research questions one and two. In doing so, it took into consideration some key points discussed in the preceding chapters.

The Sixth chapter also presents, analyses and discusses key findings from the data in support of research questions three and four.

Chapter Seven, which serves as the summary of the work provides conclusion for the study and also offers recommendations for future studies.

1.11 Chapter summary

This chapter provided a general overview of the entire study. As the first chapter of the study, it introduced the reader generally to the background, problem, research objectives and questions, and assumptions underpinning the study. In addition, it took a cursory look at the related fields of academic literacy. Particular attention was paid to the scope and volume of work that has been done so far in the field of academic literacy. Further, the chapter also provided the reader a fair idea of the methodological and research procedural strategies adopted in the study. Furthermore, the study outlined the significance of the study and concluded with the organizational plan for the study.

CHAPTER TWO

SOCIAL MEDIA AS A NEW COMMUNICATIVE ORDER

2.0 Introduction

This chapter is in three sections. The first section reviews relevant literature in the domains of social media discourse while the second focuses on academic literacy. The third section also discusses the conceptual and theoretical frameworks governing the study.

2.1 A holistic look at the field of social media

2.1.1 What is social media?

As an emerging field which is still going through the process of concretisation, there are few attempts aimed at conceptualising the field of social media. An exploration of the definitions revealed three overlapping themes: function or purpose, characteristics, and technology type. The ‘function’ or purpose driven social media definitions see social media as a media that aims at establishing and strengthening social ties (Trottier & Fuchs, 2014; Ji, et al., 2010; Richter & Koch, 2008). Thus the primary function of social media is to satisfy communicative needs. The ‘characteristics’ based social media definitions lay emphasis on the distinctive features that characterise social media; for instance, it being the creation, exchange or sharing, and consumption of user-generated content (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Acquisti & Gross, 2006).

Social media is also defined by virtue of the ‘kind of technology’ which gave birth to it; that is to say, it is a descendant of web 2.0 as against web 1.0 technology, a feature that serves as the underlining affordance for its functions and characteristics to be made manifest (Dewing, 2012). Kaplan and Haenlien (2010), for instance, purported that “Social Media is a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and

technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content” (p. 61).

Social media is also defined as “forms of electronic communication through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages and other content (as video)” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary). They are also “interactive forms of media that allow users to interact with and publish each other generally by means of the internet (en.wiktionary.org/wiki/social_media).

In addition, Taprial and Kawar (2012) explain that “social media is the media that allows one to be social, or get social online by sharing content, news, photos, etc., with other people” (p.8). The first part of this definition leaves to question the ‘social’ element of social media. Thus one begins to wonder: What is ‘social’ about this media?

As stated earlier in this chapter, social media will be used interchangeably with social network(ing) sites or platforms. Consequently, this study defines a social networking site, and by extension social media, as a ‘social’ discourse community mediated through web 2.0 technologies and largely characterised by conventional practices – evident in the choice of linguistic and paralinguistic features – which aims at promoting interactionism. The form of interaction could be one to one or one to many (which could be either intragroup or intergroup). Social media interactions could also be intra-generational, inter-generational, or cross generational. Generally, four characteristics define social media:

- It is internet based communication aided by web 2.0 technologies
- It involves the creation, sharing and consumption of user generated content
- It may have either a passive or an active audience/consumers
- It could be synchronous or asynchronous

2.1.2 The emergence of social media: A historical account

Accounts on the emergence of social media, globally, have not been consistent with the dates of the first social media platform ever used. Some accounts believe that social

media can be traced to the 1950s (Taprial & Kanwar, 2012) while other accounts mention the 1960s as seeing the introduction of CompuServe, a social media site (Bennett, 2013). That said, a close look at the literature on social media attests to the fact that social media, as we have it today, came as a result of the birth of the computer and later the internet in the 20th Century.

Thus, the emergence of the social media coincides with the introduction of the internet in the 20th Century, where users began to create, send and receive information. Accounts hold it that the internet started out as a “Bulletin Board System (BBS) that allowed users to exchange software, data, messages, and news with each other” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 60). However, not many people trace the emergence of the social media to that era because of the complexities of those earliest technologies (Taprial & Kanwar, 2012). But with the introduction of user friendly technologies which require almost no expertise in their manipulation, more and more people have begun to associate themselves with the euphoria of being part of these internet enabled and driven technologies which they, hitherto, could not readily identify as social media platforms.

Therefore, what is known today as social media has travelled across several paths for decades. This is categorised into two as follows: social media in the 20th Century and social media in the 21st Century.

2.1.2.1 Social media in the 20th Century

Social media, during this period, came with the introduction of the first super computers in the 1940s. The curiosity of the then scientists to ‘network’ the individual computers for enhanced communication led to the invention of the internet. ‘Network’ for that matter ‘networking’ is a process in computing which allows information to be transmitted from one computer to another or from one computer to several others.

It must however be pointed out that this did not happen overnight; it was a gradual process which saw the birth of some of the earliest social networks like CompuServe and UserNet

which made it possible for interactants to communicate through ‘virtual newsletters’. (Hendricks, 2013).

That notwithstanding, in the late 20th Century (1980 -90s) when more and more people began to afford personal computers, there was also this emergent realisation in the possibilities of social media communication. Thus, this period recorded the widespread use of the Internet Relay Chat (IRC) developed by Jarkko Oikarinen to aid in live discussions and blogging (Borders, 2009; Hendricks, 2013). These sites allowed users to upload profiles (usually photos) and to also have a circle of friends.

Despite all these great strides, social media patronage was among just a small circle of users. Chapman (2009) noted that despite its usefulness at the time, a predominant feature of the 20th Century social media networks, which in present day social networking term a great disadvantage, is the ability of those networked technologies to create ‘a basically-static profile’.

2.1.2.2 Social media in the 21st Century

In the 21st Century, the IRC and blogging technologies gained more popularity (Hendricks, 2013). Existing technologies were enhanced to meet the growing demands of social media practitioners. The new technologies became sophisticated in such a manner as they operated beyond the sheer luxury of creating stale profile or chatting – that is to say, not limiting users to sending only text messages but giving users the opportunity to engage in real life experiences like sharing photos, videos, music and voice messages. Thus, the emergence of new social media sites came to fill a particular social niche.

The social media of the 21st Century is characterised by an almost instant connection where people access information quicker than ever (Didelot, 2013). This is a major feature that distinguishes the 20th Century social media platforms from the present. In the 20th Century, participation on social media was more of asynchronous than synchronous. In the 21st Century, however, social media is more of synchronous than asynchronous.

Another important feature that distinguishes older forms of social media from the present day social media is the affordance of cross-posting which made it possible for users to reach a maximum number of other users with their messages within the shortest possible time (Hendricks, 2013). This new affordance of the social media underscores its multi-modal nature (Chapman, 2009) where the individuals do not have to sacrifice ‘the intimacy of person-to person communication’ while reaching out to the masses.

2.2 The emergence of social media in Ghana and among university students

Just like many African countries, Ghana’s involvement in technological advancement was a little behind time compared to some countries in the developed worlds, such as the United States of America and the United Kingdom. History records that the first internet connectivity in Ghana began in 1989 as a pilot project initiated by the Pan African Development Information System (PADIS) and the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) of Canada (Wilson, 2004).

The internet revolution in Ghana had gone through several phases and was seen as a prestigious tool in the hands of a few privileged individuals, the university communities for research, some international NGOs which had local branches, and the government ministries. Some scholars (Osei-Bonsu, 2000; Anim-Dankwa, 1998) believe that Ghana was one of the first countries in Africa to have had full internet connection dating back to 1993 and had launched into full commercialisation of the internet by January 1995. However, the internet’s widespread use by individuals and on affordable mobile technologies did not gain root until early 2000 (Kasule, 2013; Wilson, 2004).

In recent years, however, the number of internet users have increased with an increasing number of Ghanaians accessing the internet on their mobile phones. This may be as a result of successive governments’ commitment to provide “...high speed internet at affordable prices...” (Alliance For Affordable Internet, 2015, p. 2). Since there is a mutual relationship between the internet and social media usage, providing such quality internet services also means the promotion of social media communication among the citizenry.

A study by *Mobile Africa* in 2015 reports that 51% of Ghanaians use their phone in accessing the internet. While 33% always use the internet for online communication, 23.7% use it always for educational purposes (Quarshie & Ami-Narh, 2012). This suggests that more Ghanaians readily use the internet and by extension social media to connect with friends and relatives than they would for educational purposes. It is also indicated that as of June 2014, 41% of the youth ranging between age 18 and 35 access the internet at least occasionally, of which 72% are active on social media and social networking sites (Statista, 2015). The majority of these youth are university students. It will therefore be worthwhile to investigate the effects of their internet enabled social media usage on their acquisition of academic literacy.

2.3 Classification of social media

An attempt to bring all the applications that constitute social media may not only be an exercise in futility but also impossible considering the dynamics associated with social media applications and also the quest of both producers and consumers to replace their earlier applications in ensuring a better, easier and stress free life in manipulating the applications. That notwithstanding, some strides have been made in classifying social media based on some peculiar features that characterise each application of social media. The first of such attempts to classify social media platforms was done by Kaplan and Haenlien (2010) who classified social media into six distinct groups as follows:

- 1) Collaborative Projects (eg. Wikipedia)
- 2) Blogs and Micro blogs (eg. Twitter)
- 3) Content Communities (eg. Utube)
- 4) Social Networking Sites (eg. Facebook, chat, BB, 2go,)
- 5) Virtual Game Worlds (eg. World of war craft)
- 6) Virtual Second World (eg. Second life)

Aside Kaplan and Haenlien's (2010) classification of social media, there have been several attempts by other researchers to classify the various platforms that come under

the umbrella of social media. The majority of such attempts have failed to achieve autonomous distinction in the literature owing to the fact that they are all modelled on Kaplan and Haelien's earlier classification.

For instance, the DelValle Institute also classified social media into six components. These are discussed below:

A) Social networking (E.g. Facebook, Google+, and LinkedIn)

This involves the use of websites and applications to communicate informally with others, find people, and share similar interests. According to them, the main function of social networking is to allow users to directly connect with one another through groups, networks, and location. Some examples include

B) Microblogging (E.g. Twitter and Tumblr)

It involves 'posting of very short entries or updates on a social networking site. Here, users are able to subscribe to other users' content, send direct messages, and reply publicly; they are also able to create and share hashtags to share content about related subjects.

C) Blogging (Using Publishing Websites. Eg: Wordpress and Blogger)

These are used to send opinions, stories, articles, and links to other websites on a personal website.

D) Photo Sharing (Eg: Instagram, Flickr, and Pinterest)

Here, users are able to publish and share their digital photos with other users either publicly or privately.

E) Video Sharing (Eg: YouTube, Vimeo, and Vine)

This makes it possible for users to publish and share their digital photos with others either publicly or privately.

F) Crowdsourcing (Eg: Ushahidi, Inc.)

This enables users to obtain needed services, ideas, or content by soliciting contributions from a large group of people, particularly those from the online community.

Similarly, Tahir (2013) categorised social media into seven platforms. These are as follows:

- a) Social networking sites: egs: Facebook, LinkedIn
- b) Blogging: blogging, microblogging, egs: wordpress blogger, twitter etc.
- c) Media sharing: video sharing, audio sharing, photo sharing, podcast eg: Youtube, Soundcloud, Flickr
- d) Voice over IP eg: skipe, Yahoo Messenger
- e) Document sharing: slide share, Google Drive
- f) Social news: Digg
- g) Social Bookmarking: Delicious

As indicated by the above literature reviewed on the constitution of social media, scholars have diverse views as to what platforms should be thrown into the “the social media basket” due to the dynamic nature of the field. That notwithstanding, there are convergent views that social networking sites, including WhatsApp, which serves as a source of data for this study, are good representatives of social media.

2.4 The ‘socialness’ of social media

Accounts on the 'socialness' or 'socialbility' of social media have not been made bare or put forward in explicit terms as the overuse of the term does not suggest to one a moment to ponder over its meaning. This section aims at reading between the lines in an attempt at extracting the unique practices that characterise social media as a unique type of media situated in the social world so as to warrant its name.

To start with, social media is dialogic – suggesting a form of interactionism where both speaker and hearer take turns in negotiating mutual understanding through technologically mediated communicative platforms.

Also, it is marked by self-presentation through the use of user profiles which display a participant's photograph and name or nickname. Mochňacká (2009) noted that a user

profile is “a more or less complex reflection of [the] participant, his identity, work and social activities” (p. 2) which is largely a tool for self-expression. Goffman (1959) discloses that interactants are poised to control the impression people form about them by attempting to shape others’ thoughts positively concerning them and this largely accounts for the creation of webpages and blogs by individuals to project their own public image (Schau & Gilly, 2003).

Another feature of social marking is ‘status’ which in itself is a manifestation of ‘social action’. Status marking is a social activity which portrays a person’s relative standing – be it economic, material possessions, intellect, ability/capability, etc. – in the society. (Miller, 2015). Yet another element that justifies social media is preference marking. An integral part of social media activities is the affordances it provides practitioners to show their attachments, approval and disapproval, to other interactants through social actions embodied in key words such as ‘like’, ‘share’, ‘follow’, ‘tag’, etc. (Lee, 2013). Indeed, by its very nature, the internet, powered by Web 2.0, projects itself as a social mediated tool by virtue of its properties such as participation, interpersonal communication (one to many and many to many), and formation of community and sub-cultures through connectedness to other sites and people.

To a large extent, social media participation is guided by conventionalities that also exist in off line communication. Social media is therefore a means by which society is reflected through technological advancement/development, a situation which Thurlow (2003) regards as a reflection of “the human need for social intercourse – a kind of ‘communication imperative’ – [which] bends and ultimately co-opts technology to suit its own ends” (p. 10). These suggest that social media is a replica of offline, interactive social negotiations.

2.5 Research on effects of social media on students' acquisition of academic literacy

Several studies have attempted to describe and or understand the educational use of social media, for that matter, social networking sites (Mehmood & Taswir, 2013). Almost all studies on students' use of social media have concurred that social media has a significant influence on students' academic performance. The literature, however, do not agree on the direction of the effects of social media on education. While some regard social media as thwarting the efforts of teachers (Anderson, 2001; Banquil & Chua, 2009) and call for outright rejection of its use by students, a second category of researchers believe in its potential use as a tool for knowledge creation and dissemination (Oskouei, 2010); yet a third category of critics regard it as a necessary evil (Shah, Kwak & Holbert, 2001) and call for appropriate methodological measures to minimise its negative effects (if any) on students and maximise the positive effects.

2.5.1 Negative effects of social media discourse on academic performance

Mehmood and Taswir (2013) report on a study conducted by the American Educational Research Association in 2009 which confirms that 'SNSs users study less and generated lower grades eventually' (p. 113); a phenomenon which was also reported by Banquil and Chua (2009). This finding can be explained by relating it to the amount of time students spend on social media. Due to the captivating nature of social media, it easily attracts the attention of users which directly causes a gradual decrease in the grades of students (Banquil & Chua, 2009). Paul, Baker and Cochran (2012) also report that there is statistically significant adverse relationship between time spent on social network sites by students and their academic performance.

Similarly, Englander, Terregrossa and Wang's (2010) study on a micro-economic class revealed a negative relationship between the amount of time spent on the internet and the social media per week on students' performance in an examination. In like manner, a

study on 1296 participants who were all college students established a direct positive correlation between excessive internet and social media use and decreased academic grades, among other negative indicators (Anderson, 2001). Arguably, time spent on social media results in decreased study time which does have a correlative effect on the students' academic performance (Kirschner & Karpinski, 2010; Ellore, Niranjana & Brown, 2014).

Also, Adabzadeh (2013) conducted a study on the excessive use of social networking sites among under-served communities college students' academic performance. The study surveyed low-income students enrolled in six community colleges in southern California. His findings reveal a strong association between excessive use of social networking sites for non-academic work and poor academic performance. Further, Adabzadeh observed that many students have realised the potential negative effects of their excessive use of SNS on their academic achievement but lack the motivation and skills to modify their behaviour associated with excessive SNS use for non-academic purposes. He further believes that if the potentials of SNS are harnessed into a well designed, developed and implemented educational curriculum, SNS will serve as an alternative and substitute for excessive non-educational use.

Furthermore, some students chat even when lectures are on-going, thus, creating a situation of lack of concentration. Anjugu (2013) reports that students use social media mostly for chatting or affiliation than for educational purposes and that may adversely affect their academic performance since the time such students spend on social media supersedes the contact periods they allot for academic work.

In addition, more and more studies report that there is negative association between students' academic outcome and social media usage, such that students who engage in instant messaging and texting easily get distracted when performing academic tasks (Bowman, Levine, Waite & Gendron, 2009; Bryant, 2011; Jacobsen & Forste, 2010).

Generally, the negative factors that dominate the literature are that social media is time consuming, resulting in limited time span for academic activities. It also leads to addiction as well as lack of attention or concentration by students. This is because even though there is more academic content on social media, students' engagement on social media is usually for social reasons, thus little time is devoted to meaningful academic work.

Arguably, more and more students are becoming polychronic than being monochronic owing to their engagement on social media. Polychronicity, according to Kaufman-Scarborough and Lindquist (1998), is "the extent to which people prefer to engage in two or more tasks or events simultaneously. Thus, polychronic behaviour appears at first glance not to fit the more traditional step-by-step, one-thing-at-a-time suggestions which characterize efficient time management. Rather than prioritizing and ordering activities one by one, polychronic time use is characterized by overlaps of activities, interruptions, and the dovetailing of tasks" (p. 289). Some scholars believe that such social media induced polychronic tendencies will eventually result in negative academic consequences.

In summary the negative influence that social media exerts on the academic performance of students is not necessarily as a result of the emergence of the technology but the manner/level of interaction and intimacy a user establishes with the technology (Marsh, 2004). One can deduce from almost all the findings on the negative association between social media use and academic performance the unconscious emphasis placed on qualifying words such as extreme, higher, excessive, obsessive, etc use of social media. This suggests that when used with certain checks and balances or appropriately, it may result in certain mutual benefits. It further suggests that social media fanatical practitioners can be schooled to explore the positive potential affordances which the engagement on social media can provide.

2.5.2 Positive effects of social media discourse on academic performance

A study conducted by the University of New Hampshire reveals that there is no significant adverse effect of students' use of social media on their grades as students are finding more educational and professional use of social media, aside using it for recreational purposes. Madge, et al. (2009) confirm the University of Hampshire's findings as they, along the same line, argue that the youth in their new role, as 'digital natives' (Prensky, 2001), well understand the terrain of internet communication which has become an integral part of their daily routine. Such youth are, therefore, able to manipulate the dictates of both online and offline communicative divide.

Similarly, a survey conducted by *The Whittmore School of Business and Economics* did not report any correlates between students' internet usage and their academic performance (Martin, 2009). Thus, these students' social media usage has no adverse effects on their academic performance. If for anything at all, it plays an insignificant role in either promoting or limiting their academic performance. It could also be that, these students have been able to take a fair advantage of the numerous educative affordances that are associated with social media which to a great extent was able to balance the effects and rendered the negative factors insignificant.

In Japan, Kalra and Manani (2013) conducted a study on the effect of social networking sites on academic achievement among introverts and extroverts. Their findings on the one hand did not record any significant difference in the academic performance of users and non-users of social networking sites; on the other hand, even with the personality differences, no significant differences were recorded for introvert and extrovert users' or non-users' social network usage and academic performance.

2.6 Social media as a pedagogical tool

Several studies have proposed the possibility of social media use in either academic contexts or as a tool for academic purposes (Junco, 2012; Junco, Heiberger & Loken,

2011; Arnolds & Paulus, 2010; Chen, Lambert, & Guidry, 2010; Annetta, Minogue, Holmes, & Cheng, 2009; Patera, Draper, & Naef, 2008). Such studies have underscored the importance of students' academic engagement on social media. It is believed that when students' engagement on social media is encouraged, students are able to develop healthy association with peers through the establishment of a virtual community of learners which ultimately will enhance learning (Fewkes & McCabe, 2012; Jackson, 2011; Yu, Tian, Vogel & Kwok, 2010).

Kuh (2001) cited in Tarantino, McDonough and Hua (2013) explains that “[s]tudent engagement represents both the time and energy students invest in interactions with others through educationally purposeful activities” (p.3). This type of engagement should not only be limited to offline communication but also extended to online interactions through social media mediated forms of communication. Thus, Nelson Laird and Kuh (2005) report that students who use information technology, and by extension social media, for academic purposes are likely to contribute and participate in ‘active, academic collaboration with other students’. What this suggests is that meaningful and purposeful academic engagements on social media are likely to have positive impact on students’ academic life. The reverse, however, could be inferred to be true. In effect, as students engage in such purposeful academic activity online, their scope of mediation enlarges (online space complemented by offline space); they are exposed to a varied range of mediators (human: peers, teachers; technology) which corroborate the activities of traditional classroom teachers; and the students are also able to nurture the skills of collaborative learning.

It is therefore a laudable idea to promote social media as a pedagogical tool in our Ghanaian universities and in African universities as a whole since as engagement on social media increases, simultaneously, the student academic engagement also increases which invariably promotes a ‘deeper connection between students, educators, and course content’(Mehdinezhad, 2011).

For the idea of promoting social media as a pedagogical tool to achieve its intended objective of increasing positive student engagement, there is a need to introduce, early, social media literacy in our schools and classrooms. Bryant (2011) affirms that an early introduction and incorporation of social media literacy in the curriculum of high schools will improve students' attention and usage of online tools (p. 54).

Mahmoud (2013) observed that SMS can be an effective and efficient pedagogical tool used in the teaching of writing to a generation that is already immersed into such practices. He bemoans that instead of lamenting on the adverse effects of SMS and social media, teachers should harness its affordances to promote language teaching especially writing as “the best way to fight something is not to oppose it but rather to harness its own energy and convert that energy into learning” (MacLean, 2010, p. 14). In Mahmoud's experiment, he realised that using SMS and mobile phones as mediators in a less controlled environment, but insisting on the use of only formal language, students were able to improve upon their writing skills even in the formal classroom. This academic victory he believes ‘could be because students had the chance to receive immediate feedback from their teacher through the same channel away from the red pen or the embarrassing moments in front of their colleagues’ (p.17).

Considering that many teachers, not only in Ghana, for that matter Africa but all over the world, are preoccupied with means of engaging and motivating their students to be more active learners, social media can be used as a pedagogical tool to achieve this aim. The level of cordiality and relaxation learners receive from such social media platforms pre-empt this thought. Thus social media use as a pedagogical tool creates a low affective filter which ushers the learner into a meaningful but purposeful academic enclave (McGee & Diaz, 2007).

2.7 Linguistic background of social media discourse: Computer-Mediated Communication, Computer-Mediated Discourse vs. Social Media Discourse

On the whole, social media discourse can best be situated within the larger computer-mediated discourse. Prior to the emergence of social media discourse, several

researches focused on peculiarities of Computer-Mediated Communication (hereafter, CMC) to discuss general communicative affordances associated with the introduction of computers. Such studies cut across the use of networked computers or mobile telephony in different professional communicative contexts, such as advertising, journalism, sociology, and so forth. CMC is therefore defined as “predominantly text-based human-human interaction mediated by networked computers or mobile telephony” (Herring, 2007). Based on the tenets of CMC emerged Computer-Mediated Discourse.

Computer-Mediated Discourse (hereafter, CMD) is linguistics driven and modelled on the existing methodological and theoretical approach of discourse analysis. CMD is regarded here as a subset of CMC as its focus is on online language use, in other words, the discourse of online communication. One striking difference between traditional CMD and Social Media Discourse (hereafter, SMD) is based on the affordances of the technologies, i.e. its connectivity and the ability of users to generate, share, and exchange content with the help of the internet. Considering the fact that CMC has evolved drastically and pushing to the background such folk notions of it involving the asynchronous exchange of text messages, typing on a keyboard, and reading messages on networked computer screens to a better understanding of CMC being ‘any digitally mediated communication’ (Herring, 2007), social media discourse can stand high on the shoulders of CMD which, in turn, is a product of CMC.

Indeed, social media discourse should not be regarded as an independent discipline; it ought to be situated within existing theoretical and methodological approaches of Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) and Computer-Mediated Discourse through a process of convergence.

Figure1 shows the dependency of social media discourse on CMC and CMD as adapted from Herring (2007).

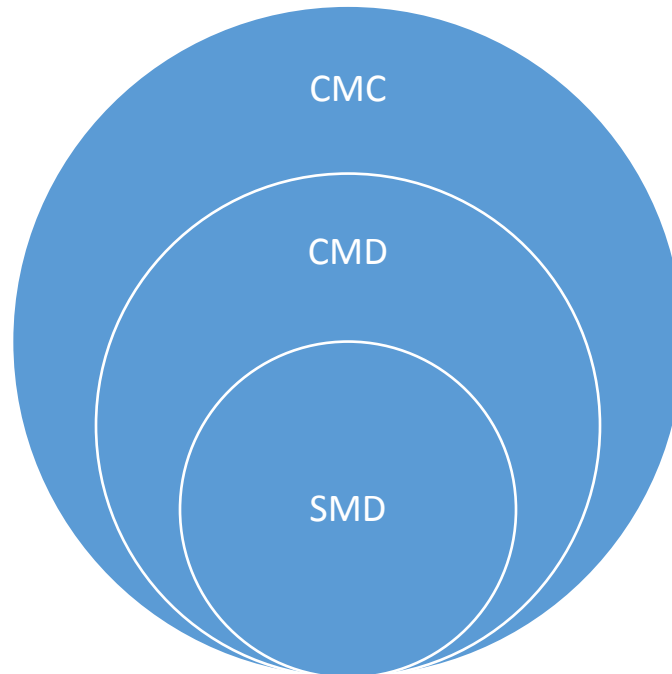


Figure 1: Interdependency of SMD, CMD and CMC

2.8 Netwrite or Netspeak? : Discourse features of social media discourse

Over the years several terminologies aimed at vividly describing the linguistic practices on social media have emerged. These terminologies which are largely descriptive in nature and formed through the process of blending relate mostly to language proficiency (*Chatspeak*, *Netspeak* (Crystal, 2006), *Textspeak* (Carrington, 2004), *interactive written discourse* (Ferrara, Brunner & Whittemore, 1991), *netwrite* (Thurlow, Lengel & Tomic, 2004), or *webspeak*; some are based solely on specific technologies – *textisms*, *emailism* (Petrie, 1999) – while others showcase a blend of technological terms and specific languages like the English language – *weblish*. Each of these terminologies reflects an adept attempt to rightly classify online or social media linguistic activities. Generally, social media discourse, just like the broader computer mediated discourse, involves a mechanized form of writing on a key board or a mobile phone or tablet which is accessible

for reading on screen through an internet enabler system (Baron, 2008). This mechanized form of writing portrays an exhibition of the features of spontaneous speech – gestures, prosody, and informality, among others – resulting into a blend of both speech and writing (Murray 1990; Ferrara, Brunner & Whittemore 1991; Maynor, 1994; Herring, 2007). It must be emphasized that strictly speaking, social media discourse makes use of all four language proficiency skills due to its receptive and productive nature.

Interestingly, just as it is in the interaction between language and older technologies, in this 21st Century, the question which remains to be answered is whether it is technology which affects the changes that are realized in language or language which rather affects technology. Expectedly, some moral or techno-panics believe that technological advancement is to blame for the changes associated with language (Thurlow, Lengel & Tomic, 2004; Huang, Kuo, Lin & Cheng, 2008). This position cannot be entirely true since the interaction between language and technologies is such that users of the technology, for communication purposes, adapt specific linguistic variables, as it were, to suit the peculiarities of technological variables (not necessarily technology itself) and the same can be said in this era of social media (Barton & Lee, 2013). These happenings, further, underscore an aspect of language as a malleable object which is capable of easily adapting to the features of other interactive mediums at any given time.

Thus, as a result of the introduction of the internet and communication devices such as the computer and the mobile (smart) phones to mediate an existing or traditional field of communication, it is natural to expect that such technologically induced language may undergo some modification in order to suit the dictates of the new media. In such cases, the features of technology become a driving wheel for the changes that may occur in the language. And on a more general communication note, contextual variables such as the type of channels in use (e-mail, instant messages, etc.), the participants (youth, adult), as well as the topic and purpose (friendly chats among contemporaries, business enquiries) account for the choice of linguistic features (Thurlow, Lengel & Tomic, 2004).

In addition to the contextual variables are some technological variables that are likely to affect the form of language use on social media (Herring, 2001). They are synchronicity, granularity and multimodality. Synchronicity is whether the mode of communication is synchronous, or asynchronous. For example, instant messaging is synchronous while emailing is asynchronous. Thus it is almost reasonable to identify more of shortening, omissions and truncated sentences with instant messages than with emails. At the same time social media exchanges are more synchronous, and therefore transient, than asynchronous.

Another technological variable which constrains the linguistic features associated with social media discourse is granularity (Cherry, 1999); that is to say, how long or short a text may be, on the limit on size of the message. Also, multimodality (i.e. whether or not graphics, audio and video are included) as a technological variable may affect language and language usage on social media. Thus these technological variables account for the changes that are associated with social media discourse.

Also, Thurlow, Lengel and Tomic (2004) indicate that the 'physical constraints of technology' account largely to differing linguistic forms associated with online communication. For instance, the fact that it involves typing on a keyboard, with its accompanied emphasis on speed which ought to be almost at the same rate as speaking, the attempted and utter display of eloquence in computer jargon by specialists and the high level of informality associated with the medium. Thus, the quest to explore the affordances the keyboard presents, and also in a more efficient and economical way, results in most of the writing conventions we associate with online and social media discourse.

Some common discourse features that characterise language online, as reported in the literature, are presented below:

- word compounds and blends (e.g. *weblish*, *shareware*, *netiquette*, *e-* and *cyberanything*);

- abbreviations and acronyms (e.g. *THX* 'thanks', *IRL* 'in real life', *F2F* 'face-to-face', *some1* 'someone');
- minimal use of capitalization, punctuation and hyphenation – or none at all (e.g. *cooperate* and, of course, *email* and *internet*);
- generally less regard for accurate spelling and/or typing errors;
- less or no use of traditional openings and closures (e.g. use *Hi* or *Hello* instead of *Dear.*). Sometimes people will use nothing at all – especially in online chat and instant messaging where your user ID is given automatically
- letter homophones (e.g. *RU* 'are you', *OIC* 'oh, I see'), acronyms (e.g. *LOL* 'laugh out loud', *WG* 'wicked grin') and a mixture of both (e.g. *CYL8R* 'see you all later');
- creative use of punctuation (e.g. multiple periods . . . exclamation marks *!!!!*);
- capitalization or other symbols for EMPHASIS and *stress*;
- onomatopoeic and/or stylized spelling (e.g. *cooooool*, *hahahaha*, *vevy intewestin* 'very interesting')
- keyboard-generated *emoticons* or *smileys* (e.g. :-) 'smiling face', ;-) 'winking face', @>—; — 'a rose');
- direct requests (e.g. *A/S/L* 'age, sex, location?' and *GOS* 'gay or straight?')
- interactional indicators (e.g. *BBL* 'be back later', *IGGP* 'I gotta go pee', *WDYT* 'what do you think?')
- with more elaborate programming, colored text, *emotes* (e.g. *{Sender} eyes you up and down*, *{Sender} cries on your shoulder*) and other graphic symbols (e.g. images of gifts and accessories in Virtual Worlds).

(Source: Thurlow, Lengel & Tomic, 2004, p. 124).

Accordingly, language online is largely reported in the literature to be friendly and immediate (Collot & Belmore, 1996), a hybrid form of speech and writing (Crystal, 2004), and it deviates from traditional grammar rules (Thurlow, Lengel & Tomic, 2004).

2.9 Chapter Summary

This second chapter reviewed literature on social media discourse as a discursive practice. It was observed that engagements on social media dated back to the 20th Century. In addition the domain of social media has distinctive discourse markers which are largely informal. Some studies on social media effects on academic communication showed an adverse correlation between time spent on social media communication, among other factors, and time spent on academic work. That notwithstanding, when appropriate pedagogical interventions are instituted, such adverse effects may be minimized.

CHAPTER THREE

ACADEMIC LITERACY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter reviews literature on literacy practices in education. It covers what academic literacy encompasses, as well as the interplay of university students' social media discourse and academic literacy skills. In order to understand the discussion on academic literacy, the section opens with a general overview of what literacy entails.

3.1 What is literacy?

Traditionally, the term literacy is understood as the ability to read and write. That is, the ability to decode and encode alpha-numeric signs (Street, 1993; Pahl & Rowsell, 2005). But in recent times this view has since been expanded as it is deemed narrow and unable to reflect the complexity of thought and capabilities of the 21st Century literate. Today as we find ourselves engulfed in excessive information, literacy is not only our ability to read and write but also our ability to analyse information critically.

Thus, “[i]n the twenty-first century, literacy involves not just reading and comprehending the text in front of you, but a wide range of skills associated with acquiring, decoding, evaluating, and organizing information within a global electronic library.” (Warlick, 2004, p. 20). Literacy also involves “the integration of speaking, listening, viewing and critical thinking with reading and writing, and includes the cultural knowledge which enables a speaker, writer or reader to recognise and use language appropriate to different social situations” (MCEETYA, 2007, p.10).

The scope of literacy is no more limited to the traditional classroom where acquisition of knowledge was predominantly equated to one's ability to master the 3Rs: *Reading*, *wRiting* and *aRithmetic* (Warlick, 2004). In present day, however, literacy should be regarded as the ability to fully understand a particular domain, concept or even subject.

That is to say, an individual's ability to get fully integrated in the social, cultural and contextual, as well as the linguistic intricacies of a particular domain in a more engaging manner. Literacy therefore becomes a skill which can be acquired, mastered, and applied to other areas of life.

Considering the fact that there are different modalities of literacy, the terms 'literate practices' or 'multiliteracies' are sometimes used to emphasise the diverse ways we interact with text of various forms: written, spoken, visual, digital, etc. Accordingly, there are different types of literacies. Some common ones include academic literacy, information literacy, cultural literacy, digital literacy, media literacy, among others. Central to these forms of literacy is one's ability to literally 'read' or decode information from each of these in a more engaging manner so as to also literally 'write' or encode knowledge acquired in a more fruitful and analytical manner for an enhanced living.

3.2 What is Academic Literacy?

Academic literacy is a kind of linguistic ability or language competence that facilitates a student's communication and membership in the academic community (Sebolai, 2016). It is characterised by both logical and analytical thinking in relevant academic contexts. Similar to what pertains in other discourse communities, the language of academia may be regarded as new and secret (Pennycook, 1999) especially to new members of the discourse community. Thus, a student who is academically literate demonstrates the ability to cope with the multilayered demands of the discourse of the world of academia, in general, or within a given academic field of study (Sebolai, 2016). Indeed, academic discourse is unique, so does the acquisition of academic literacy require the attainment of certain set of skills. Such skills may include the ability to classify, compare and contrast, draw inferences, cohesion and coherence. Within the fraternity of scholarship, a direct terminological substitute for academic literacy is Cummins's term "academic language", earlier referred to as CALP (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency). Cummins (1984; 2009) cautions that academic language should not be mistaken for Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) which is more conversational in nature since it is language

competence necessary for everyday social interactions while the former is a set of language competence necessary for academic success. Attaining academic literacy is not a one time off phenomenon. It requires a process of exposure, understanding, practice and immersion. Thus different levels of competence is reached as one progresses in academia.

3.3 Proficiency in English or Academic Literacy in English?

Over the years, in most English medium academic institutions, proficiency in language or specifically English (for most second language English speaking countries) has been misconstrued for academic literacy. Language (English) proficiency involves general use of language, to a large extent listening and speaking, and to some extent, reading and writing but which does not require stringent analytical reasoning (Sebolai, 2016). While a learner may need to attain an appreciable level of proficiency in English to be able to demonstrate his/her ability to cope with the demands of academic discourse, attaining proficiency in English itself does not amount to academic literacy (Gee, 1990; Pennycook, 1999). The linguistic abilities that will amount to academic literacy and that of proficiency in English are aptly referred to by Van Dyk and Weideman (2004) as the lingual and the formative – the formative dimension being labelled as proficiency, competence, mastery of language, among other terms (Blanton, 1994; Gee, 1998). To this end, academic literacy in English is not the same as proficiency in English but academic literacy measures the students' extent of control over academic language.

Academic literacy is rooted in the principles of Communicative Language Teaching (hereafter CLT) spearheaded by linguists such as Christopher Candlin, Henry Widdowson and D.A. Wilkins in the 1960s and the 1970s. The main focus of CLT is to project the ability to communicate in different contexts of communication as the central principle of language teaching. English proficiency on the flip side is a residual of the traditional structural-situational and the audiolingual approaches to language teaching that prioritise mastery of the grammatical systems of language (Richards, 2001; Sebolai, 2016). Considering the traditional philosophical as well as pedagogical approaches that gave

birth to the field of academic literacy and English proficiency, one can deduce that whereas both academic literacy and English proficiency demonstrate some language abilities, the former is open in nature while the latter is restrictive (Van Dyk & Weideman, 2004). This deduction is necessary because the principles of the structural-situational and audio-lingual language teaching regime which is mimicked by some English proficiency programs conventionally limit language ability to the understanding of ‘a combination of sound, form, and meaning, or, in technical linguistic terms, phonological, morphological, syntactic and semantic elements’. This structuralists view of language is in sharp contrast with the tenets of CLT, the predecessor of Academic Literacy, which regards language ability as ‘not only expressive, but communicative, intended to mediate and negotiate human interaction’ (Van Dyk & Weideman, 2004, p.5). This distinction is made clearer in the table provided below:

Table 1: Van Dyk & Weideman’s (2004) Restrictive and open classification of language functions

Restrictive	Open
Language is composed of elements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sound • form, grammar • meaning 	Language is a social instrument to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mediate • negotiate human interaction • in specific contexts
<i>Main function: expression</i>	Main function: communication
<i>Language learning = mastery of structure</i>	Language learning = becoming competent in communication
<i>Focus: language</i>	Focus: process of using language

3.4 How is academic literacy measured?

What counts as academic literacy is typically dependent on the theoretical views on academic language or discourse. Thus academic literacy is an operational evidence of academic discourse (Patterson & Weideman, 2013), where the characteristics of academic discourse in itself cannot be limited to only its lexical and syntactic features but also its content and subject matter (Weideman, 2009). Academic discourse, irrespective of the discipline, is first of all analytically or logically driven, and second, historically

grounded (that is built on earlier styles of the discipline). The practice in most institutions of higher learning is to measure the academic literacy level of the students through standardised testing.

That notwithstanding, for a typical academic literacy test to be meaningful, it must be designed to cover two broad areas: the language of instruction of the given field of study as well as the academic demands or requirements of higher education expected from students (Cliff, Yeld & Hanslo, 2006). The under listed are sample guidelines or construct depicting the academic literacy ability that is required of university students:

- Negotiate meaning at word, sentence, paragraph, and whole-text level.
- Understand discourse and argument structure and the text 'signals' that underlie this structure.
- Extrapolate and draw inferences beyond what has been stated in text.
- Separate essential from non-essential and super-ordinate from sub-ordinate information.
- Understand and interpret visually encoded information, such as graphs, diagrams and flow-charts.
- Understand and manipulate numerical information.
- Understand the importance and authority of own voice.
- Understand and encode the metaphorical, non-literal and idiomatic bases of language.
- Negotiate and analyse text genre.

(Cliff, Yeld & Hanslo, 2006, p.20)

3.5 The dynamics of academic literacy

Academic literacy may be approached from two main angles: a narrow and a broader view. In its narrow sense, academic literacy is understood as “the ability to read and write the various texts assigned in [university]” (Spack, 1997, p. 3). That is to say, acquisition of academic literacy skills is equated to one’s ability to read and write effectively in a college or university. However, from a broader perspective academic literacy

encompasses one's understanding of the field of study, research skills, good reading and writing skills as well as the understanding of the sociocultural environment one is admitted into (Braine, 2002). Academic literacy, therefore, involves understanding and the ability to abide by the academic as well as the socio-cultural norms of the institution one identifies with.

Davidson and Tomic (1999) argue that 'in order to write "successfully" students must enter into the secret life of the university – its ethos, values expectations – all the elements that inform language but go beyond language'(p. 161). In other words, an academically literate student is one who understands and is able to put into practice the literacy practices of the academia as a community of practice and is able to apply those set norms appropriately within and outside the academic community.

Academic literacy, just as discourse, is best mastered through acquisition, not learning, so is literacy best mastered through acquisition, not learning. The focus of academic literacy is for students to acquire specific academic skills and appropriate academic language to help them learn effectively and also to integrate into the educational structure. To this end, two practices are crucial to the attainment of academic literacy: academic discourse and academic exposition. Academic discourse covers the modes of communication among members of the community that reveal their ideologies and shared goals. Academic exposition, in turn, encompasses critical thinking and writing strategies that aim at effective communication of ideas.

If there is anything that remains unchanged about the characteristics of academic literacy, in my view, is the feature of adaptability, thus, the characteristics of academic literacy are not monolithic but keep modifying or being modified to suit current trends. These days, when as part of the assumed background of teaching, learning, presentation of assignments, among other academic tasks, (university) education involves the use of technology and the internet, the scope of academic literacy ought to be enlarged to encompass literacy in technology and internet, which together may be referred to as digital literacy.

Academic literacy has a close tie with English for Academic Purposes (henceforth EAP); it is often seen as an approach to EAP. These days, however, it is gaining or has almost gained its autonomy as an academic field of study. Two other current approaches to EAP are study skills and disciplinary socialisation.

EAP in itself is a branch of English for Specific Purposes (ESP); EAP pertains to the “language and associated practices” which are needed by university/college students studying in English medium higher institutions. One of its main aims is to make it possible for learners to acquire the “linguistic and cultural – mainly institutional and disciplinary – practices involved in studying or working through the medium of English” (Gillet, 2001, p. 1).

Hyland (2006) notes that as more and more students, from different races, social-cultural and economic backgrounds try to access higher education, there exists diversity in the learning needs of students. Such diversity presents challenges such as students inability to communicate competently in their discipline specific areas, or to adjust to new modes of teaching and learning (eg. distance and electronic), and by changes in both academic and societal perspectives.

Thus, the traditional certainties about teaching and learning have or are giving way to new approaches, shifting EAP’s focus of addressing learners’ abilities and inability to access the discourse of the academy to more engaging areas such as the ‘influence of culture and the demands of multiple literacies on students’ academic experiences. These new happenings, over the years, have resulted in several pedagogical perspectives one of which is the study skills approach.

The study skills approach to EAP is a move to de-emphasise the teaching of linguistic forms to a more skills-oriented curricula as it shows that “students need more than linguistic knowledge to be successful in their study” (Hyland, 2006, p. 17). As a result, instead of focusing on linguistic forms, the emphasis is on contextualising the language skills that ought to be learned.

Another approach to EAP, disciplinary socialisation introduced a more discipline-oriented and discourse-based dimension to EAP. This approach views learning as a form of getting the learner acculturated into the culture of a discourse community. Here, students are immersed into the linguistic forms and strategies through which knowledge is reflected in particular fields of study. Each field of study is believed to be associated with certain cultural norms which students are expected to acquire together with the discourse competences that distinguishes them as members of the community. Hyland (2006) reports that “unlike the study skills approach, the disciplinary socialisation implies an integrated view which links language, user and context; it [thus] locates EAP at the heart of university teaching and learning and of students’ orientation to, and success in, their fields of study” (p. 20).

Just like the disciplinary socialisation, academic literacy as an approach to EAP focuses on the way language is used in a particular context but sees language usage as an action where both teacher and learner actively participate within a particular context (Street, 1995); this exposes the power differentials between the participants and or across the different fields of study.

Academic literacy thus stems from the understanding that literacy is something that ‘we do’ (Hyland, 2006); accordingly, literacy is an action word (Street, 1995), an activity “located in the interactions between people” (Barton & Hamilton, 1998, p. 3). In addition,

“[L]iteracy is integral to its context...a dominant feature of academic literacy practices is therefore the requirement to switch practices between one setting and another, to control a range of genres appropriate to each setting, and to handle the meanings and identities that each evokes” (Hyland, 2006, p. 21).

This suggests that even within academia, there are different kinds of literacies involving the different disciplines that students belong to. Based on the relationship between academic literacy and EAP, this study conceptualises academic literacy from the basic

understanding of a good core knowledge of the cognitive, social and linguistic domains of academic life to a broader area of technical literacy which includes being literate in computing.

3.6 Social media and the acquisition of specific academic literacy skills

Just as has been reported on the effects of social media on general academic performance, there is not much consensus among scholars concerning the effect of social media language on the acquisition of specific academic literacy skills. While some record a negative correlation between some literacy skills and social media discourse, there are other views that established a positive relationship between social media usage and the acquisition and demonstration of specific academic literacy skills, such as writing. Studies which predict a negative relationship between the two phenomena situate their argument in two memory theories of learning: retroactive interference and trace decay.

According to some psychologists, as more and more tasks are committed to memory, the mind gets cluttered; hence, what is learned later interferes with what is learnt earlier (Bower, Thompson-Schill & Tulving, 1994; Baddeley, 1999). This psychological phenomenon is known as retroactive interference (RI). Going by the principles of the retroactive interference theory, it may be inferred that excessive engagement on social media discourse has the potential to interfere with other forms of knowledge acquired earlier, including academic literacy skills. If this extreme is not the case, another effect of the retroactive interference, though still negative, is that the information which is later acquired may slow down the recollection and production processes of the initial information received (Drouin & Davis, 2009). As a counter argument, Pinel (1993) suggests that since the retroactive interference theory involves the long-term memory which is not known to easily discard information once stored, if it does happen in the case under consideration, it could be that the information was not well consolidated due to some external factors.

In a similar vein, the trace decay theory of forgetting stipulates that there are neural connections that are associated with learned information; however, these neural connections become dysfunctional out of disuse (McLeod, 2008). This goes to suggest that practitioners of social media discourse risk losing knowledge acquired from academic literacy practices should they depend excessively on social media communication at the expense of academic communication. But since the theory of trace decay is associated only with the short term-memory, it could also be argued that its effects will be realised on students only when they failed to fully internalise the knowledge acquired.

The literature on academic literacy presents diverse literacy skills. These include, reading, writing, listening, speaking, critical/analytical thinking and technical/computer skills. The dominant ones being reading, writing and analytical thinking. The current study, however, regards critical/analytical thinking as the underlying form of all the other skills with the understanding that the affordances of the 21st Century have transformed students from being mere passive recipients of knowledge or information to being active and, in principle, collaborators of the creation of knowledge. And by extension, listening, for example, as an academic literacy skill must be characterised by careful evaluation and judgement, so must reading or speaking. To that effect, this section reviews literature on the effects of social media discourse on reading and writing as academic literacy skills; however, the analysis of the data is based solely on writing skills, which preferably may be termed as “critical writing skills” to reflect the fusion of critical thinking skills.

3.6.1 Social media and the acquisition of ‘Reading skills’

Drouin and Davis’ (2009) experimental study to ascertain the effects of text-speak on both texters and non-texters standard English literacy revealed that texters’ literacy levels for spelling, word recognition and reading fluency were not significantly different from non-texters’. They further propound that “the use of text speak neither speeds up nor slows down processing from one lexicon to another” (Drouin & Davis, 2009, p. 15).

Accounts from the students, interestingly, expressed their fears that using text-speak makes it difficult for them to remember some Standard English words and their spellings or has the potential to result into that. Based on these accounts from the researchers and the students, one can deduce that using text-speak frequently may not, necessarily, have an instantaneous effect but it may have an eroding effect on students' academic literacy in the long term. Perhaps, a longitudinal study may come handy to put this into perspective.

Also, some US students' self-reported texting frequency was found to be significantly positive to their ability to spell and read fluently (Drouin, 2011); so did some Australian students' 'textism reading accuracy and message composition speed' positively correlate with their conventional spelling and reading scores (Kemp, 2010). Similarly, Jackson et al., (2006) report that students who use the internet frequently scored higher in reading and do generally well in terms of academic performance.

On the contrary, De Jonge and Kemp (2012) asserted that 'frequent text-messaging', 'greater use of textese' and 'more varied textism types' negatively affected Australian undergraduate students' performance on spelling and reading assessments. And also Grace, Kemp, Martin and Parrila (2013) report that naturalistic use of textese correlates negatively with reading and spelling among US students, yet only negatively in spelling among Canadian students.

In the same vein, Dixon and Kaminska (2007) in an experimental study on the exposure of young adults and children to misspelled words "suggested that young adults' spelling performance is more likely to be disrupted by exposure to misspelled forms than that of children (p. 8).

Of much importance to these findings is the central element of the method used in arriving at the results, since similar samples are likely to produce mixed results, contingent upon the literacy tasks employed (Wood, Kemp, Waldron, & Hart, 2014). However, for effective

acquisition of academic literacy in the university, these three fundamental reading competencies are deemed vital:

- reading for literal comprehension and retention;
- reading for depth of understanding; and
- reading for analysis, and interaction with the text. (ICAS, 2002, p. 17)

The last two, especially, are recommended in the 21st Century university. As a result, selected texts from students' social media conversations may be analysed in class as reading texts so that, even within seemingly informal contexts, such students will be motivated to unconsciously engage in analytical reading.

3.6.2 Social media and the acquisition of 'Writing skills'

Nunes, Bryant and Bindman (1997) cited in Wood, Kemp, Waldron, and Hart (2014) are of the view that the “nature of the English spelling system means that phonological and orthographic conventions often interact with conventions about morphology, including grammar” (p. 11). This is by far true which also goes to support the view that students who do not have a consolidated foundation in standard English grammatical rules, yet text excessively, are likely to commit grammatical errors induced by social media language in their academic writings.

Yet, Gray (2015) believes that through text messaging, students can be encouraged to write short summaries about short stories, plays, news items or even what they remember most about an event for an engaging class discussion. Also, a study by the Centre for Technology Implementation (2014) reveals that although ‘it may not seem like it, texting [predominantly through social media platforms] is writing, and students who are frequent texters are therefore frequent writers. As such, it makes sense to harness all of this energy to help ... students build their writing skills” (p. 1).

On the flip side, some studies have established a negative relationship between “the proliferation of informal writing, instant messaging, and text speak and a decrease in

students' writing quality" (CTI, 2014) yet more and more studies (Wood, Jackson, Hart, Plester, et al., 2011; Wood, Kemp, Waldron, & Hart, 2014) have rather established a positive relationship between engagement in social media discourse and students' writing skills. For instance, Thurlow (2003) after reviewing about 500 social media messages authored by British teenagers came to the conclusion that the messages evidenced the practitioners' skillful and communicative ability. This goes to support Sweeny's (2010) assertion that by integrating social media into writing instructions, "teachers can provide a bridge to emerging forms of writing and communication and make writing more meaningful and engaging for students of the digital era" (p. 122).

Purcell, Buchanan and Friedrich's (2013) interaction with National Writing Project Teachers reveals that "digital tools make teaching writing easier, despite an increasingly ambiguous line between formal and informal writing and students' poor understanding of issues such as plagiarism and fair use" (p. 1).

In assessing the views expressed in the literature on the link between social media and the acquisition of academic literacy skills, it is evident that there is a growing trend supported by research about the positive effects of social media practices on the acquisition of academic literacy skills such as writing. However, what remains unexplored and need attention is the question of how to blur the "increasingly ambiguous line between formal and informal writing". Once this question is properly put into perspective, social media can serve as an effective pedagogical tool.

Another concern is that the majority of these findings are among first language and foreign language speakers of English. There is very little or no voices coming from Second Language contexts like Ghana; just as there is the need to avoid researchers' generalisations across the continent, a study such as this will help put such findings into perspective.

3.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter focused on academic literacy as a set of distinct literacy skills pertaining to academia. Academic literacy is the ability to demonstrate mastery in both academic language and the multi-layered demands of a given academic field of study, simultaneously. It requires the ability to critically encode and decode information in the university or college. Accordingly, being academically literate requires a learner's ability to negotiate meaning in various texts and critically engage with texts by drawing inferences beyond what has been stated in the text, using appropriate academic language. The next chapter discusses the research design and the enquiry process.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH DESIGN AND THE ENQUIRY PROCESS

4.0 Introduction

In line with the main objective of this study which was to examine the implications of language use in social media by Ghanaian university students on their acquisition of academic literacy, this chapter presents a detailed discussion on the research design and how it was implemented. In addition, the chapter describes the enquiry process which includes the methodological approach that shaped the study, as well as the population, setting, and investigative tools, among others. Also, the chapter presents the ethical considerations that underpin the study.

4.1 Research Design

van Wyk (2012) describes research design as “the overall plan for connecting the conceptual research problems to the pertinent (and achievable) empirical research”(p. 4). That is, a research design articulates the kind of data to collect, how it is to be analysed and relates these two stages to the research questions by observing their relevance to the research questions.

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2006) equates research design to the construction of a building. With this analogy, just as the construction of a building does not commence until one deliberates on the kind of building to construct in the first place, a research design is concerned about what is to be investigated. To this extent, a research design addresses logical problems rather than logistical challenges (Yin, 1989).

The primary aim of a research design is to ensure that the researcher through evidence gathered provides appropriate answers to the research questions (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2006). Yet to be able to answer the research questions, one ought to state in clear terms

the kind of evidence needed: is it to test a theory, evaluate a phenomenon or even to describe an occurrence?

Central to the research design is also the purpose of the enquiry. It can be one or an integrated approach of exploratory, description, evaluative, and predictive. As stated in chapter one, the purpose of this study is to explore, to describe, and to explain the terrain of language use on social media by Ghanaian university students and its impact on their acquisition of academic literacy. A detailed discussion on each of these points will be provided later in the chapter.

There exists a fundamental difference between research design and research method. A research design asks the question: “what evidence is there to collect?” – serving as a ‘logical structure of the enquiry’ – while research method borders on the mode of data collection (i.e how the evidence is to be collected), as to whether questionnaires, participant observations or focus group discussions will be utilised. Thus, the researcher’s ability to evaluate the research design properly leads to the selection of an appropriate method. The current study is guided by this fundamental difference between research design and research method.

Van Wyk (2012) has identified three characteristics of research design. They are presented as follows:

- End-product: What kind of study is being planned and what kind of results are aimed at? For instance, historical-comparative study, interpretive approach or exploratory study, inductive and deductive etc.
- Point of departure (driven by the research problem or question).
- Logic of research: What evidence is required to address the question adequately?

From all these accounts it can be inferred that the research design starts with the conceptualisation of what to do, why it must be done, and then how it should be done. In this regard, the research design serves as a strategic plan or blue print that drives the

various components of the research with the sole aim of answering the research questions.

The research design for this study is modelled on Durrheim's (1999) conceptual framework. Durrheim (1999) organised research design into four components, namely: purpose, paradigm, context and technique. This is presented in the diagram below:

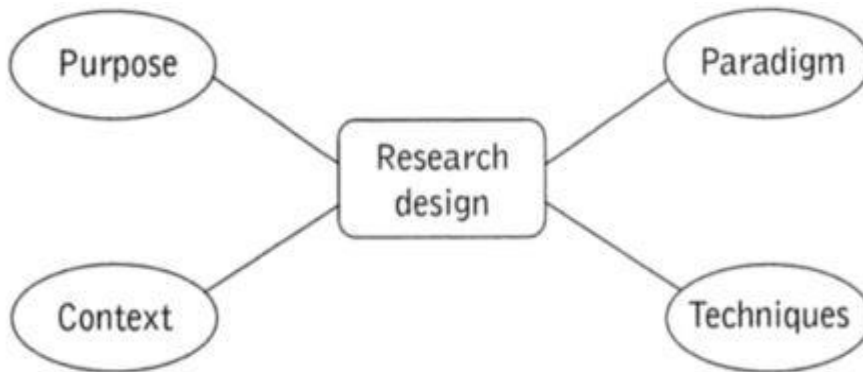


Figure 2: Durrheim's (1999) Four dimensions of research design

4.2 Research Paradigms

A researcher's design is often influenced by certain beliefs or paradigms. A paradigm is understood to be the fundamental belief system or world view that directs the investigation (Guba & Lincoln, 1994); a kind of "a loose collection of logically held together assumptions, concepts, and propositions that orientates thinking and research" (Bogdan & Biklan, 1982, p. 30). Also, Willis (2007) conceptualises a paradigm as a holistic belief system, a world view, or a framework that undergirds research and practice in a specific field. Paradigms then become a set of beliefs, or convictions about how the world is shaped or constituted. This world is not the physical world, but the world of knowledge and research. Paradigm, again, becomes the unspoken, conventional underlining factor driving the enquiry. Accounts on the number of paradigms which inform and guide enquiry have not been consistent; however, Guba and Lincoln (1994) have identified four of such which have been discussed below: positivism, post positivism, critical theory, and constructivism.

The positivist paradigm investigates, confirms and predicts rule-governed codes of conduct (Taylor & Medina, 2013). The positivist paradigm is also known as naturalism and objectivism. The main import of positivism is to project objectivity, neutrality and distance between the enquirer and the object of enquiry in order to avoid biases (Sarantakos, 2012; Thompson, 1995). This paradigm is more evident in natural science researches, such as physics and biology. Findings from the positivist paradigm are characterised by generalisations derived from patterns and regularities from similar situations. The positivist paradigm is experimental and largely quantitative in nature.

Likewise, the post-positivist paradigm is, but a “milder”, variant of the positivist paradigm (Willis, 2007). It is built on the same tenets of positivism in exception of the fact that it encourages more interaction between a researcher and research participants. The primary aim of the post-positivist paradigm is to “produce objective and generalisable knowledge about social patterns, seeking to affirm the presence of universal properties/laws in relationships amongst pre-defined variables” (Taylor & Medina, 2013, p. 7). Accordingly, it uses quasi-experimental research designs as methodological tools and favours the quantitative method, just as the positivist paradigm.

Contrary to the first two paradigms discussed above, the critical theory paradigm aims at addressing societal inequities. It focuses its lenses on the socio-economic as well as political inequalities among subjects and empowers them, through advocacy, to demand a positive change in their existing states of affair. Unlike the first two paradigms, the critical paradigm uses more engaging and critical qualitative approaches in order to ensure radical social, economic, political and pedagogical changes.

The constructivist or interpretivist paradigm is based on relativist and subjective understanding of realities and the nature of knowledge. This paradigm recognises people not as individuals who operate in a vacuum but people who are capable of exploring their world and the world around them (Sarantakos, 2012). A major tenet of the constructivist

or interpretivist paradigm is to understand human experiences, therefore it depends largely on qualitative methods to achieve its aim.

From the above discussion, it is evident that paradigms are like doctrines which define for the researcher the nature of the world, the researcher's position or role and his/her level of interaction between other units of the held view. Research enquiry paradigms then become the lens through which the world of research is conceived, construed and implemented.

Three main assumptions undergird every paradigm:

1. The form and nature of reality; that is, "how things really are" and "how things really work" (ontology)
2. The relationship between the researcher and the object of research as well as the findings to expect; that is, the kind of knowledge to be generated (epistemological)
3. How the reality can be investigated or means of generating the knowledge (methodological)

This current study is influenced by two anti-positivist paradigms: constructivism and critical theory. Thus, using the ethnographic methods of participant observation and key informant interview, this research is grounded first of all in the constructivist paradigm. This approach is justified because the study aims at soliciting primary data from a context which could best be described as the natural setting of the people so as to produce a thick description of the research participants' cultural views and practices.

Furthermore, the study is grounded in the critical theory paradigm since its supplementary aim is to advocate the use of relevant social media platforms to enhance teaching and learning. A blend of these two paradigms provide a thick description of Ghanaian university students' social media usage and linguistic practices as well as recommend a more positive engagement with social media platforms towards the acquisition of time-tested academic literacy skills.

4.3 The research methodology

There exists little or no consensus among researchers regarding what counts as research methodology. Some researchers use the term *methodology* interchangeably with *method*; while others believe that there is a need to draw a line between the two terms. McGregor and Murnane (2010) have observed that in most research projects, the common practice is to use the term ‘methodology’ as the heading, yet what comes under the heading is a description of the methods employed in the research design. This is an indication that for most researchers these terms – *methodology* and *method* – are interchangeable.

Brewer (2000) asserts that methodology is the “broad theoretical and philosophical framework into which...procedural rules [methods] fit” while “methods are merely technical rules, which lay down the procedures for how reliable and objective knowledge can be obtained” (p. 2). Thus, a study can be flawed as unreliable and unobjective if the procedural, or the step by step, rules of arriving at the findings cannot be trusted.

The word methodology is comprised of two nouns: *method* and *ology*; the suffix ‘-ology’ simply means a branch of knowledge; “hence, methodology is a branch of knowledge that deals with the general principles or axioms of the generation of new knowledge. It refers to the rationale and the philosophical assumptions that underlie any natural, social or human science study, whether articulated or not.” (McGregor & Murnane, 2010, p. 2). Methods, on the other hand, are the procedures or processes by which the methodology will become operationalized – a means of concretising or putting a frame around the abstract concept. One can deduce that methodology begets method whereas it is almost impossible for a method to produce a particular methodology.

Pole and Morrison (2003) assert that “methods can be seen to relate to the tool bag from which the researcher selects the most appropriate instrument with which to gather data and subsequently to analyse those data” (p. 4-5). This assertion goes to suggest that methodology sets or detects the ground rules as to how the research should be conducted and methods implement these rules.

A methodology can be said to be qualitative, quantitative or a combination of these two: qual-quant. Method embodies all but is not limited to the following research strategies: sampling strategies, data collection strategies, data analysis, discussion of results, theoretical and conceptual framework. Brewer (2005) further classifies all the various components under method into three: method of research enquiry, method of data collection and method of data analysis. These three classifications are re-constructed and represented visually in the diagram below:

Figure 4.2: Types of research methods

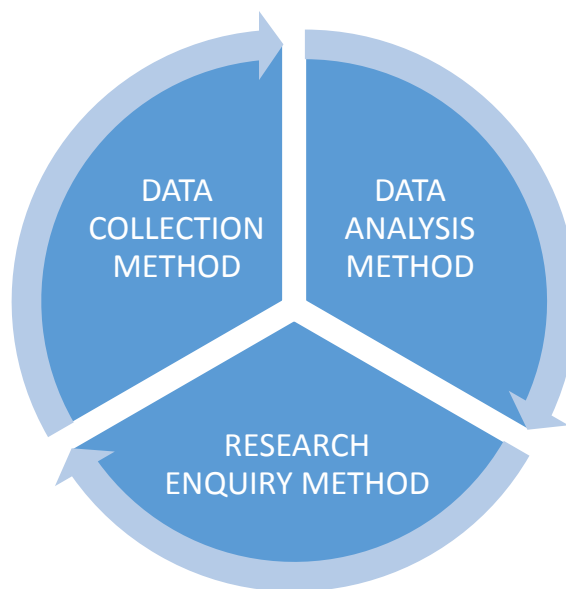


Figure 3: A field construction of Brewer's (2005) trio-classification of research methods

These various components are not entirely discrete in nature but have become practices which interact with one another.

This study will keep the two terms distinct; that is in this study, methodology is understood to be the theoretical and philosophical approaches that delineate how the study is conducted, while the term method will be reserved for the procedural strategies that actually helped directly in achieving the goals of the research. Accordingly, this study has adopted the qualitative methodology due to its main aim of assessing 'unquantifiable fact'

(which is mostly the case in quantitative methodology) so as to structure and assign the exact meaning participants ascribe to their actions and meanings (Seale, 1999).

4.3.1 Qualitative Research

As stated earlier (See section 4.3), the study adopts the qualitative approach, since it aims at getting a deeper and holistic insight into the nature of social media discourse among the study participants. Thus an open-ended and a “naturalistic approach” was followed. Bogdan and Biklen (1982) liken such an approach to a funnel indicating that in such studies, ‘things are open at the beginning (or top), and more directed and specific at the bottom’ (p. 29). That is ‘refined and standardized rules’ are not followed since such acts have the tendency of skewing research findings rather, the data is allowed to take its course; thus, I only come in to describe what pertains in social media discourse by Ghanaian university students. To Schurink (1998), the qualitative paradigm stems from an “anti-positivistic, interpretative approach; it is idiographic, thus holistic in nature and the main aim is to understand social life and the meaning that people attach to everyday life” (p. 241). Some characteristics associated with qualitative studies are outlined as follows:

- It uses inductive reasoning (as noted by Neuman, 1994)
- It aims at understanding ‘phenomenon within a particular context’. That is, it is context based.
- It sees behaviour as ‘intentional’ and ‘creative’ which is explainable but non-predictable.
- Meaning derived is based on the subjects’ perspective.
- It is also exploratory rather than verifiable.

The above characteristics attest to the lack of uniformity associated with methods involving qualitative research (Hammersley, 1992; Silverman, 1989). Some of these approaches used over the years are ethnography, phenomenology and ethnomethodology and the historical method. The others include Applied and Action research, Clinical methods, Symbolic interaction, Grounded theory, as well as Secondary

analysis (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Schrunik, 1998). For the purpose of this study, the ethnographic method has been adopted as a strategy of enquiry among other qualitative strategies of enquiry. The rationale is to be able to gain an appreciable insight into language use in the social media by Ghanaian university students.

The term ethnography has been ascribed several meanings and interpretations over the years with the term used as synonym to refer broadly to other qualitative research approaches (Hammersley, 1989; 1990). Pole and Morrison (2003) believe that the 'ambiguity and complexity' of its meaning can be attributed to its frequency of usage in education setting and other social researches. Perhaps an apt description of ethnography is captured by Gobo (2001). Gobo thinks that the most distinguishing feature of ethnography from other methods is "a more active role assigned to the cognitive modes of observing, watching, seeing, looking at, gazing at and scrutinizing" (p. 15).

This study has adopted Brewer's (2000) understanding of ethnography as its working definition. It states:

Ethnography is the study of people in naturally occurring settings or 'fields' by methods of data collection which capture their social meanings and ordinary activities, involving the researcher participating directly in the setting, if not also the activities, in order to collect data in a systematic manner but without meaning being imposed on them externally (p. 6).

Several issues emerge from this definition: an ethnographic study is participant centred, done without coercion or under no duress, requires researcher or observer involvement which could either be overt or covert, and the story or findings are crafted by the participants not the researcher. The researcher to a greater extent only acts as an instrument at the mercy of the participants. His/her job is to trace to make visible the image the participants have posed; thus, acting as the voice of the seemingly voiceless participants. This pose of the researcher enables him/her to report what is seen or heard and not impose his/her meaning on the participants. Similarly, in line with the objectives

of the current study, the social media linguistic practices of the participants are explored and presented in descriptive terms to project the views of the social media patrons under study.

Atkinson and Hammersley (1998) outlined some features of ethnographic study. According to them an ethnographic study involves the following:

- people's behaviour is studied in everyday contexts rather than under unnatural or experimental circumstances created by the researcher;
- data are collected by various techniques but primarily by means of observation;
- data collection is flexible and unstructured to avoid pre-fixed arrangements that impose categories on what people say and do;
- the focus is normally on a single setting or group and is small-scale;
- the analysis of the data involves attribution of the meanings of the human actions described and explained (pp. 110-11).

A summary of the distinguishing features of ethnographic study is important here for two reasons: first, to help in understanding what it is; and second, to help differentiate it from other research designs under qualitative study. These are made easy with the help of questions on four key items and answers to these questions as represented below:

1. What is the GOAL of the study? – To explore, describe and explain the effect a phenomenon has on the participants or the entire community or world, or on certain people in the community
2. What is the ROLE of the researcher? – Active involvement in the field or with the people
3. What kind of DATA is the researcher interested in? – People's ordinary activities in naturally occurring settings
4. What kind of DATA COLLECTION METHOD does the researcher use? -

Unstructured and flexible methods of data collection such as participant observation

However, considering the importance attached to the emerging field of social media discourse, there is the need for new methodological designs or the reshaping of traditional methods to account for online practices. Indeed several online researchers (Barton & Lee, 2013; Leander, 2009; Hine, 2000) have underscored the necessity for this. For instance, Hine postulates that the internet should be seen as culture which may call for the appropriate approaches to cultural studies like ethnography; thus, he notes:

Naturalistic studies overall, and ethnography in particular, have posed a challenge to the limited view of CMC [Computer Mediated Communication] provided by experimental studies. In highlighting the rich and complex social interactions that CMC can provide, researchers have established CMC as a cultural context. In doing so, researchers have drawn upon frameworks that focus on the construction of reality through discourse and practice. A style of ethnography that involves real-time engagement with the field site and multiple ways of interacting with informants has proved key in highlighting the processes which online interactions come to be socially meaningful to participants. In claiming a new field site for ethnography and focussing on the construction of bounded social space the proponents of online culture have, however, overplayed the separateness of the offline and the online. (p. 27)

In response to the need for a well-organised terminology that will reflect the cultural practices on line, Kozinets (2010) has proposed the term, 'netnography' to reflect the specific domain of ethnographic study. 'Netnography' is a coinage from the words "internet" and "ethnography". It is an adaptation from the traditional ethnographic framework to suit the 'complexities' of internet or technologically-based communication or interaction. It follows in the same direction of ethnographic study; the slight point of departure is that netnographic study is based solely on practices in the virtual community.

4.3.1.1 Netnography as a method of 'thick description'

The term 'netnography' was proposed by Kozinets (2010) in response to the need for a well organised terminology that will reflect online cultural practices; it is situated within the specific domain of ethnographic study. Kozinets (2010) believes that, "online communities form or manifest cultures, the learned beliefs, values and customs that serve to order, guide and direct the behaviour of a particular society or group" (p. 12). As mentioned earlier, 'netnography' is a coinage from the words "internet" and "ethnography". It is an adaptation from the traditional ethnographic framework to suit the 'complexities' of internet or technologically based communication or interaction. It follows in the same direction of ethnographic study; the only difference between the two is that netnographic study is based solely on practices in the virtual community.

Also, Kozinets (2010), cited in Bowler (2010) asserts that, "[i]n many of its renderings, netnography maintains the values of traditional ethnography through providing a Geertzian sense of "thick description" through the "immersion" of the researcher in the life of the online culture or community" (p. 127). This is a replica of traditional or offline ethnographic practices of participant observation which also comes through prolonged engagement and deep immersion.

Bowler (2010) contends that the internet, for that matter social media, encourages more and more people's engagement in communication leading to the formation of communities. Indeed, the formation of these virtual / online communities are accompanied by its associated cultures or ways of life, a replica of offline communities. To understand the cultural practices of social media communication, the researcher needed to observe participants in their natural social media settings; thus, the netnographic method is appropriate in order to launch the researcher into a kind of deep online immersion.

As part of the netnographic method, the study also adopts the constructivist paradigm of exploration, description and explanation. These supporting sub-methods of the qualitative approach helped to make meaning out of the natural and unstructured data. These three are discussed below.

4.3.2 Exploratory Research

Research in social media discourse is still an emerging area of concern. It is characterised with the creativity and ingenuity of language use, not to mention its level of fluidity. Since the phenomenon is as at now at its developing stage and thus cannot be said to be exhaustive, it will be premature to begin to generate fixed rules or descriptions for it: there is the need to first of all explore the issues associated with it. Accordingly, this study commenced with an exploration of Ghanaian university students' social media usage in line with the purpose of the study. Neuman (2007) believes that an exploratory study, of this nature, "examines a new area to formulate precise questions that [the researcher] can address in future research" (p. 16). Such an exploratory study aims at gaining more insight into the new phenomenon. Thus, the emergent role of social media discourse among Ghanaian university students was explored to ascertain its impact on their acquisition of academic literacy. As part of the exploration, I sought to find out the nature of the Ghanaian university students' social media discourse, its impact (either positive or negative) on their acquisition of academic literacy and how social media can effectively be employed to enhance the teaching and learning of academic literacy skills.

4.3.3 Descriptive research

Having explored the terrains of social media discourse by Ghanaian university students, a detailed description of the occurrences is provided. A descriptive study paints a more detailed or concrete picture of the phenomenon under study and this in my view cannot be effectively done if the social issue is not first of all explored either by the same researcher in the study or through findings established by earlier researchers. But since this is a pioneering study in the field of social media and Ghanaian university students' acquisition of academic literacy, an exploration was first needed before a description of the findings.

The descriptive nature of this study also satisfies a primary concern of qualitative research which proposes that to fully understand the researched phenomenon, the researcher

needed to describe what he/she observes and not only explain it (Henning, 2004; Mouton, 2001). Again, Neuman's (2007) assertion of descriptive research corroborates the view that descriptive research provides a vivid illustration on the occurrence of a phenomenon as well the people involved in the situation; it focuses on who was involved and how the occurrences manifest themselves. To this end, the study (see Chapter Five) offers a description of the linguistic patterns that have emerged in social media discourse practices of Ghanaian university students.

4.3.4 Explanatory research

After giving a detailed description on the explored phenomenon, my next stage was to ascertain "why things are the way they are"; thus the study offers detailed explanation on the linguistic choices made in social media discourse by Ghanaian university students. This is to say why they engage in such online linguistic practices, the effects of such social media engagements on university students' academic literacy skills, and how instructors can utilise the tools in this new communicative order to enhance the effective teaching and learning of academic literacy skills.

4.4 Context of the study

In line with the general objective of the study to investigate the effects of language use in social media on Ghanaian university students' acquisition of academic literacy, the population for the study comprises Ghanaian university students. Ghana is a West African country, popularly acclaimed to be the first African country to have attained independence from her colonial masters, the British, on 6th March, 1957. The country prides itself in education thus aims at ensuring that "all citizens regardless of gender or social status, are functionally literate and productive at the minimum" (Ghana: Vision 2020). Consequently, one can infer that literacy is key and this has reflected in the educational sector of the country as it is 'endowed with a good education system' (BBC News, 2005).

As evidence of the high level of literacy in the country, Ghana serves as a hub of over 60 accredited universities. Ten (10) of these are public universities with the rest 51 being private universities. The research is based on Ghanaian university students; thus, the study is situated in Ghana, specifically in two universities: the University of Ghana and Valley View University. Both universities are located in the Greater Accra Region of the country. The Greater Accra Region is one of the ten regions of Ghana and it currently holds the administrative capital of the country. The choice of these two universities is deliberate – the University of Ghana is the premier university in Ghana; it is also ranked as the best public university in the country. Valley View University is, as well, known to be the premier private university in Ghana and it is also widely acclaimed as the second best private university in the country, per the 4International Colleges and Universities' ranking (2016 university web ranking).

The University of Ghana was set up by an Act of Parliament on October 1, 1961 (Act 79) with the then head of state, Dr Kwame Nkrumah as the first Chancellor and Nana Kobina Nketsia IV, Omanhene of Essikado, as the (Interim) Vice-Chancellor. Prior to this, the University of Ghana started in 1948 as the University College of the Gold Coast on the recommendation of the Asquith Commission, on Higher Education in the then British colonies. Following on the mission of The Asquith Commission, in 1943 to investigate Higher Education, it was recommended that University Colleges be set up in association with the University of London.

The University College of the Gold Coast was founded by Ordinance on August 11, 1948 for the purpose of providing for and promoting university education, learning and research. From its inception, the university college was regulated by an Inter-University Council set up by the British Government to play advisory roles in the new British Colonies. This collaboration helped the College to maintain a high academic standard in congruence with the universities in Britain to date.

Currently, the University of Ghana practises the collegiate system and it has four colleges: College of Humanities, College of Education, College of Basic and Applied Sciences and

College of Health Sciences. The university also remains as the oldest and largest of all the public and private universities in Ghana. It admits both local and international students from about 70 countries. Presently, the university has a student population of over 38,000 made up of both undergraduate and graduate students from the regular, sandwich and distance education programmes (University of Ghana Publications).

Valley View University started as the Adventist Missionary College (AMC) in 1979 under the auspices of the West African Union Mission of Seventh-day Adventists and it was later absorbed into the Adventist University system in 1997, under the West Central Africa Division (WAD) now West Central African Division of Seventh-day Adventist. The University was initially located at Bekwai-Ashanti. In 1983, it was transferred to Adenta near Accra and later relocated to its present site near Oyibi. There, it was renamed Valley View College, and, subsequently, Valley View University.

The University is affiliated to Griggs University in Silver Springs, Maryland, USA, and it has two regulatory bodies: the Adventist Accrediting Association (AAA – since 1983) and the National Accreditation Board (NAB) of the Ministry of Education in Ghana (since 1997). Valley View University remains the first private institution in Ghana to be granted a presidential charter. It has five campuses: Oyibi (the main campus), Techiman, Tamale, Kumasi and Takoradi. Currently, the University boasts of a student population of over five thousand (5,000) and it serves both local and international students from over 21 countries (VVU, Public Affairs Publications).

4.5 Study population

The population of this study comprises all Ghanaian university students. The target population is constituted by first year undergraduate students from two universities in Ghana: the University of Ghana and Valley View University. These students must have enrolled on a compulsory semester course in academic literacy skills. The study excludes graduate students since most of them have already passed the stage where intervention would not all that be a necessity. Also, the second, third and fourth year undergraduate

students are excluded from the study. This is because a study of this nature, Johns and Swales (2002) note, can be done at university 'entry' level or 'departure' level. Thus, only first year students are used for the study because the first year of an undergraduate programme serves as the transition period from the senior high school to the university. At this point, the fresh students do enter the university with a lot of baggage – linguistic, social, study habits, etc – that may not be suitable for academic work.

4.6 Study Sample

A sample is a group or a set of people selected from a larger group or parent population for analysis purposes. Due to time, cost and practicality issues, all first year students from the two universities could not be included in the data, therefore there was the need to select a sample based on the population. Miles and Huberman (1994) aptly capture it in these words: "As much as you might want to, you cannot study everyone everywhere doing everything" (p. 27). Thus there is a need to make choices as to whom to talk to where, when, how and why. This is what translates into what is referred to as sampling. Sampling, therefore, is an act or process of identifying a sub-set of a population which exhibits the characteristics of a phenomenon the researcher is interested in.

In this study, there is less emphasis on sample representativeness but on a sample that will be able to shed light on participants' social life and reveal deep truths about their social media linguistic practices. Neuman (2007) notes that for qualitative researchers, representativeness of samples receives less attention, instead, concerns are geared towards the ability of the sample, as small as it may seem, to reflect the complexities of social life and contribute to knowledge. Flick (1998) also underscores the notion of 'relevance' of the sample to the research topic in a qualitative study and not the sample's representativeness. Guided by this supremacy of 'relevance' over 'representativeness', the sample for the study was drawn from all the colleges, faculties and departments found within the two universities which form the settings of the study.

To arrive at the specific sample for the study, a purposive technique was used to select a sample of students who belong to a general academic literacy programme rolled out by each of the two universities to equip freshmen and women with the necessary academic communication skills that will enable them succeed in their new academic environment. Accordingly, the constitution of these classes reflects all academic fields or disciplines run by the two universities.

For the purpose of this study, a class is defined as a group of first year undergraduate students (not exceeding 60), who undertake an academic literacy course under the tutelage of an instructor, for a semester or two. The total number of first year undergraduate students who enrol on the academic literacy programmes in both institutions depends on the universities' intake of freshmen and women for a particular academic year. But to provide an overview of past precedence, the University of Ghana for the 2013/2014 academic year admitted a total of about 5,000 freshmen and women on its main campus which is used for the study (the University of Ghana publication on basic statistics, 2013). This number is then divided into two equal halves of about 2,500 (which is further divided into several manageable groups made up of between 40 and 60 students per instructor for a period of two hours per week) to undertake the academic literacy course for the first semester and the other half for the second semester.

Likewise, Valley View University admitted a total of about 2,000 freshmen and women for the 2013/2014 academic year on its main campus. Considering their comparatively low number, all the first year students undertook the academic literacy course in the first semester; needless to say, they were also divided into several manageable groups of 40 to 60 students per instructor for a period of two hours per week.

The actual sample for the study thus is made up of a class from each university for the first semesters only. And this was done over two first semesters. (That is first semester of 2014/2015 and first semester of 2015/2016 academic years).

4.6.1 Sample size

Using purposive sampling, four classes (two from each institution) were selected for the study. The breakdown is presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Breakdown of Sample Size of Research Participants

Institution	Academic year / semester	Class	Number of students
University of Ghana	2014/2015 (First Semester)	First class	45
	2015/2016 (First Semester)	Second class	46
			Total: 91
Valley View University	2014/2015 (First Semester)	First class	50
	2015/2016 (First Semester)	Second class	47
			Total: 97
			Grand Total: 188

Accordingly, a total sample size of one hundred and eighty eight (188) participants participated in the study. The selection of this small size to represent the Ghanaian university students has become necessary due to the qualitative and netnographic nature of the study. This is with the understanding that one needs a smaller sample size to be able to do a close and in-depth study. Also, though the sample looks small in size, the data that is to be generated is huge considering the fact that the study considered daily interactions of all one hundred and eighty eight (188) participants (that is 95 participants from both institutions for the first phase of the study and 93 participants for the second phase of the study).

Thus a larger sample size for this kind of study will not only be difficult to manage but will also lack the needed focus or attention. It is also in line with Dornyei's (2007) observation that a qualitative enquiry is not much concerned about representativeness instead, it centres on identifying individuals who possess rich and diverse insights into the phenomenon under study so as to maximise what can be learnt.

4.6.2 Sampling techniques

Broadly, there are two types of sampling: probability or random and non-probability (Neuman, 2007). The random or probability sampling is usually associated with quantitative studies while the non-probability sampling best suits qualitative studies. There are also different types of non-probability sampling which include convenience sampling, quota sampling, snow bowl sampling, deviant case sampling, purposive sampling and sequential sampling. Since this study is qualitative in nature, two non-probability sampling techniques – purposive sampling and criterion sampling – were found relevant to the objectives of the study and have subsequently been employed. As noted by De Vos (1998) and largely supported by this research, “[t]he overall purpose of the use of the relevant sampling techniques in qualitative research is to collect the richest data” (p. 330).

4.6.2.1 Purposive sampling

The purposive sampling technique comes handy in situations which require that a researcher employs judgement in selecting subjects based on a specific conviction (Neuman, 2007). Owing to that, purposive sampling is also known as judgemental, subjective and selective sampling. Purposive sampling starts with the formulation of clear criteria on the kind of data to collect and the kind of participants who are capable of exposing the researcher to the rich information there is (Patton, 1990). Purposive sampling usually feature in exploratory studies. In this study, the purposive sampling method is adopted, first of all, to identify a social setting with participants not from the same discipline but from diverse academic disciplines, as well as participants from heterogeneous socio-economic, ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. Therefore, it is more fruitful to target a social group (academic group in this case) where individuals from heterogeneous backgrounds are likely to converge.

Another reason is that since evaluation of academic literacy skills can either take place at “entry” or “departure” levels (in this case first and final years of undergraduate study)

of the students' academic life, it is prudent to adopt the purposive sampling in order to decide on the entry level participants, since they constitute a unique case of trend setting.

The third reason for selecting the purposive sampling is that the choice of this sample type is to be able to identify specific types of cases for in-depth investigation which will serve as the second source of data for this study. This third reason necessitates a supplementary sampling technique, which is criterion sampling.

4.6.2.2 Criterion sampling

Criterion sampling involves the identification and selection of those unique cases that meet some 'predetermined' criterion or standard (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002). This sampling method helps the researcher to identify, for further interrogation, cases that are 'information-rich'. It therefore works as a follow up strategy in an attempt to further understand the deeper meaning of participants' actions and inactions, feelings and thoughts – in effect, the reasoning behind certain occurrences in the life of the participants. In this study, the criterion sampling was used to select participants for the key informant interview. This selection was done based on the participants' active involvement or participation in sending comments and responding to other people's comments daily on the social media page created purposely for the study.

4.7 Data sources

This study adopts an eclectic approach in collecting data. In all, three categories of data were obtained for analysis and discussion. The first category of data came from participants' interactions (chats) on the social media application known as WhatsApp (selected based on responses from the questionnaire). The specific research instruments used to solicit this data are participant observation and field notes.

The second source of data came from a sub-section of the total sample size. The criterion for the selection of this sample is active participation on the WhatsApp platform set up. Thus using a criterion sampling method, four (4) active participants from each of the four

groups were selected. This gives a total of 16 participants (almost 10% of the sample size from both universities). Within the confines of this study, 'active participation' is a situation where a participant consistently features, on the average five times, daily on a group page either by posting a thread (chat) or responding to someone's. Key-informant interviews were conducted for all sixteen (16) participants based on the conviction that they possess 'rich information' that define their practices on social media. The specific investigative tool used in soliciting this data is semi-structured interviews.

Furthermore, the study also compared performances from selected academic writing genres: examination scripts and course assignments of the sixteen (16) participants. The essence of this is to ascertain the extent of possible effects of social media discourse on academic literacy skills as a result of the infusion of linguistic choices and practices from social media. This is to help consolidate the findings that may come from the two sources of data discussed above. This was measured through text analysis and by the help of the socio-cultural theory and the theory of error analysis.

4.7.1 Observation

The main tool of investigation is participant observation. Participant observation aims at unearthing the significance subjects ascribe to their day to day interactions and existence (Schurink, 1998). This, Schurink explained, results in a 'dual role' where the researcher on the one hand tries to get involved in the participants' 'life world' in order to understand their train of thought and ways of doing things and on the other hand the researcher tries to 'distance' himself from the participant's 'life world', observing from afar the actions and inactions of the participants. Hagan (1982) thinks participant observation involves a conscious effort on the part of the observer to operate on two different cognitive levels of simultaneously acting as an insider as well as an outsider.

Powdermaker (1966) refers to this as 'involvement and detachment'. Such mixed-style of overt and covert researches have a stronger influence on the quality of data sought than in the extreme cases of pure overt or covert research styles. Accordingly, this study

adopted a mixed-style of the covert-overt observation postulated by Gold (1958) as 'observer-participant'.

As noted by Brewer, participant observation aims at two things:

- To understand the world as it is seen by those acting within it;
- To reveal the taken-for-granted, common-sense nature of that everyday world itself (p.60)

Both of these aims were employed in this study. Consequently, this calls for a tactful approach. First, the participants' perspectives were sought to ascertain how they make sense of the world around them (Schurink, 1998). With this, the researcher attempted to get an insider perspective into certain acts of the participants in order to reveal certain truths about them. It requires that the researcher as it were enters the world of the participants to uncover why they do what they do and say what they say. This revelation can only be realised through some form of participation and first-hand experience of the phenomenon which is to be understood (Ackroyd & Hughes, 1981).

Likewise, this study sought to understand how Ghanaian university students manipulate language on social media platforms; why they choose certain words and expressions; and above all what activities they embark on on social media, paying close attention to their inner thought or "life world" (Schurink, 1998). Consequently, this study was approached from the participants' point of view. Due to the dynamic nature of social media discourse, I considered to a greater extent the participants' perspective and the description of the linguistic phenomenon characterised by the discipline.

Also of equal importance to the study was the time spent with the participants in their natural setting, being mindful of the great force the setting exerts on the authenticity of findings. Accordingly, a considerable time was spent on the social media sites patronised by the participants, following closely their day-to-day activities on the social media platform. This was aimed at gathering information that will reflect in its entirety the

occurrences that take place in the participants' "ordinary, usual, typical, routine or natural environment" (Jorgenssen, 1989, p. 15).

Also, the aim of spending a considerable amount of time on social media was to help delineate the information gathered from the data. However, in order to overcome any skewed information that will result from the participants' phobia associated with the presence of the researcher, the observation was done over a prolonged period of time (three months), where I participated passively in participants' activities, observed their reactions meticulously, compared other sources/occurrences for deviations or conformity in actions, and confirmed each action and inaction of the participants. In essence, the study employed practitioners of social media interactions as informants, directly observing their socio-linguistic life by participating in their day to day social media interactions.

In summary, the investigative approach was holistic factoring in issues of "holistic injunction" (Noblit & Engel, 1992) in understanding how, where and under what circumstances certain linguistic choices made on social media are negotiated. And as also indicated by Bodgan and Bicklen (1982), the primary concern was on the process rather than simply focusing on outcomes or products. Thus a holistic study of the participants helped to understand their actions and inactions, impulses, free wills, as well as their deliberate manipulations of language choices on the social media. This was aimed at bringing value to the study.

4.7.2 Field notes

Field notes were taken which formed part of the primary data-gathering techniques. As part of this, specific events or occurrences in terms of language usage in social media by the students were recorded for future references. Field notes are detailed narrations of real events; a daily account and chronological description of the participants' actions and the setting (Strydom, 2005; Schurink, 1998; Arkava and Lane, 1983).

Taking field notes was particularly important for this study because it helped in recording, instantly, valuable experiences that may have otherwise been lost in the process of data collection. The field notes were handwritten in a log book purposely set aside for the study. This provided the opportunity for 'reflection, interpretation and analysis' (Vanderstoep & Johnston, 2009, p. 239) of the thoughts as and when they occurred.

4.7.3 Key-informant Interview

Kvale (1996) cited in Dornyei (2007) explains that "the typical qualitative interview is a one-to-one professional conversation that has a structure and a purpose to obtain descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena" (pp. 5-6). Key-informant interview is also known as individual interview (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003), in-depth and open interviews. It is a means of getting detailed or in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study. In essence, it provides deeply rooted and delicate responses to complex systems, processes or experiences (Legard, Keegan, & Ward, 2003).

Owing to the qualitative nature of this study, a structured interview was found to be inappropriate for the study. This is because a structured interview will produce closed-ended questions which will in-turn elicit predicted responses and prevent the researcher from delving deep into respondents' preserved thoughts contrary to the purpose of the study. Instead, a semi-structured interview was used as a supporting data-gathering strategy. This took an open-ended format but with a touch of laissez-faire style aiming at getting the responses in an elaborative, yet structured manner (Dornyei, 2007). The interview was recorded using an audio recorder. Before the interview was recorded, duly signed ethical clearance was sought from the respondents.

An interview can be conducted by a face-to-face mode or via telephone. Doing a telephone interview saves time, space, and it is quicker than face-to-face interviews yet it lacks an important feature that is associated with face-to-face interviews; that is the use of visual clues or paralinguistic clues such as eye contact, nods in agreement or

disagreement, puzzled looks and smiles (Walliman, 2001). Morton-Williams (1993) reports that telephone interviews record 5-10% non-response rates higher than their equivalent face-to-face interviews.

In this study, I employed the face-to-face medium of interviewing because it will enable me to judge the quality of the responses and to take advantage of the respondents' visual modes of communication towards the attainment of complete responses (Walliman, 2001). Another reason for doing a face-to-face interview is that aside its added advantage of providing physical encounter between the interviewer and the interviewee, it is also flexible, interactive and generative in nature, resulting into in-depth exploration of linguistic choices and their meanings (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

4.7.4 Questionnaire

There are several types of questions including closed or open questions. Close-ended questions are also known as structured questions while open-ended questions are, alternatively, referred to as unstructured questions. Open-ended questions are unstructured because they require free, unlimited and unrestricted responses. This suggests that respondents have the affordance to provide varied responses (Neuman, 2007). Further, closed-ended questions produce fixed responses which usually take the form of selecting options from pre-determined alternatives.

Both type of questions come with pros and cons. For example, an advantage of open-ended questions is that respondents are able to provide detailed accounts of their beliefs and convictions on the said questions resulting into rich, uncodified information. At the same time, such responses may result into unending meaningless accounts that may not fit into the objectives of the study. The closed-ended questions, on the other hand, produce straight-to-the-point responses aiding the researcher in coding and comparing responses; however, such responses lack the tenacity to provide rich-information on complex issues.

This study employed the closed-ended questions because the aim was not to receive detailed and creative responses. Rather, the questionnaires served first of all as an access tool to get into contact with the participants and second as a tool for recruiting the participants for the netnographic study. Together with a consent form, the closed-ended questionnaire was used as a preliminary investigative tool to make contact and establish rapport with the study participants.

4.7.5 Justification for choosing WhatsApp as the preferred source of netnographic data

The WhatsApp Messenger is an almost free application that allows the subscriber to send text messages with photos and videos from a smartphone. The company charges, on the average, \$1 per year for using the application. The WhatsApp Messenger is noted to support a wide range of telecommunication technologies (for example, android, iOS, BlackBerry, Windows Phone and Symbian); it uses no advertisements and it currently has about 450 million monthly users (Martin, 2014). From the participants' point of view, they are comfortable settling on WhatsApp for their communication needs for the following reasons:

1. It is interactive and synchronous.
2. It combines instant messaging with video calls, audio messages and paralinguistic features, for example, emoji and smileys.
3. It allows individual as well as group chats with in-built privacy features.
4. As an application which was originally and still largely designed for mobile devices, it is a convenient, accessible and cheaper mode of communication especially among students compared to other social networking sites.

Thus, since these days mobile devices are preferably used by most people to access social media sites, for instance, Facebook, Tweeter, it seems reasonable to suggest that the characteristics of language use (in terms of composition) on a smart phone medium would be typical across all social networking sites.

4.7.6 Data collection process

Prior to the process of data collection, a proposal was designed which was presented through a seminar to the Department of English, and then to the School of Human and Social Sciences' Higher Degree committee of the University of Venda. Upon their recommendation and acceptance, the proposal was then presented to the University Senex for final approval. A letter was then submitted to the University of Ghana and Valley View University offices of the Dean of Students requesting for approval and ethical clearance to conduct the study in both institutions. Following favourable responses from both institutions, a group of first year students were identified and selected through purposeful sampling. These first year students belong to the same academic writing course run by each of the two institutions earmarked for the study.

The initial research instrument used to recruit participants for the study was a structured questionnaire which has a consent form attached. The purpose of the research and the need to form a group on social media was explained to the respondents. The participants were informed on the requirements of being part of the research group. These requirements are outlined as follows:

1. Must be a full member of the sample class
2. Must have a mobile device that supports social media applications
3. Must be willing to participate in the study but if otherwise, should inform the researcher before exiting the group page

By popular acclamation, WhatsApp application was agreed upon by the class as the social network of choice for the group; accordingly, the course representative for each class was made to open an account on WhatsApp for the class using the telephone numbers provided willingly by members of the class. The students were made to understand that participation or non-participation in the online study will not in any way affect, adversely, their traditional classroom experience.

As already stated in section 4.7, data for this study came from three sources: the social media chats, key-informant interviews and an evaluation of participants' academic scripts. The procedure for the collection of the data from the social media chats was done in two phases. The first phase started from October to December, 2014 (representing the first semester of the 2014/2015 academic year; the second phase commenced in October and ended in December, 2015 (also representing the first semester of the 2015/2016 academic year for both universities). The choice of these phases is deliberate – to make room for any new affordances that may occur in-between the first and second years of data collection. Dornyei (2007) chose to label this 'iteration', a phenomenon which aims at filling gaps in the initial description or expanding and/or challenging existing scopes of data.

Using a netnographic approach and participant observation as an investigative tool, an observation of the participants' negotiations of meaning and language was done daily through their social media chats for a consistent period of three (3) months (for the first phase) and another three (3) months (for the second phase) – resulting in a cumulative total of six (6) months of data collection. This is to provide ample time to observe the frequency of occurrences of the linguistic phenomena used in social media and in effect allow for the establishment of 'coherent threads' (Spilioti, 2006).

The second source of data was collected through key-informant interview. Using criterion sampling, sixteen participants (almost 10% of the total sample size of 188) who distinguished themselves by actively contributing to discussions on the designated WhatsApp page were interviewed using a semi-structured interview guide. The interview was a face-to-face, one-on-one conversation with each of the sixteen (16) participants and it aimed at capturing in-depth interviewee's social media nuances in their natural form. The interview was conducted within a time frame of 30-40 minutes depending on each respondent. It was tape recorded with the consent of each of the interviewees.

Finally, the last source of the data came from an evaluation of the sixteen (16) participants' examination and other academic scripts. Here, the scripts of the sixteen (16)

key informants were sampled to observe their demonstration of academic literacy skills. The specific academic literacy skill that was observed is the writing skill. As far as the examination of participants' writing skills was concerned, the focus was more on the micro-level than on the macro-level. Thus the theory of error analysis was instrumental in identifying and classifying students' writing related errors. These writing related errors were analysed in tandem with the key-informants' responses as well as the description of the linguistic features observed in the WhatsApp chat to ascertain any possible influence of social media discourse on academic literacy skills.

Figure 4 presents a visual representation of the sources of data and the various investigative tools used in measuring them.

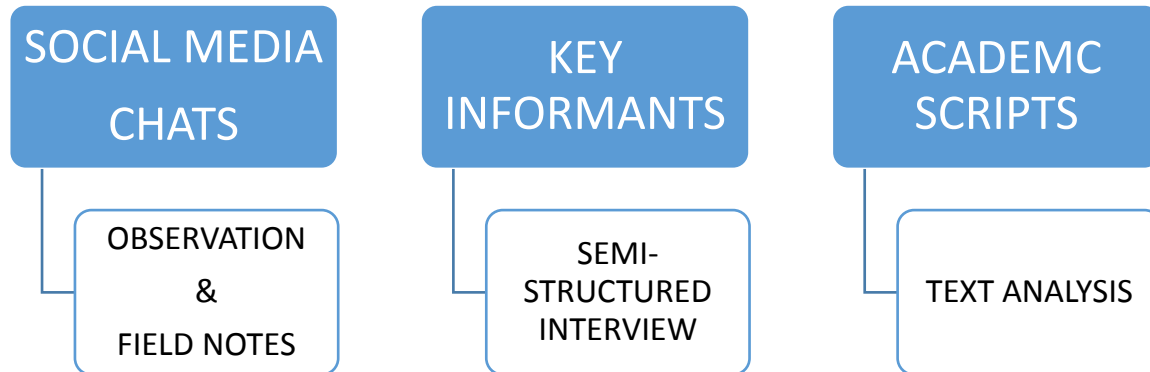


Figure 4: Sources of data and investigative tools for data collection

4.8 'Trustworthiness' of the study

Of much importance to the overall assessment of a research is its resilience expressed in quality and sustainability. A study which exhibits the associative 'character' of in-built

confidence or credibility associated with the data and theoretical underpinnings easily gains the trust of other researchers to generalise its findings (Patton, 2015). Generalisation in social research, according to Ritchie and Lewis (2003), “concerns the potential for drawing inferences from a single study to wider populations, contexts or social theory.”(p. 285). Discussions on generalisation may be representational (extending findings of the current study to the bigger population of the study), inferential (extending findings from the current study to other population similar to the context and or outside the confines of the study), and theoretical generalisation (extending the findings of the current study to prove, improve or even disprove existing or new theories).

Traditional criteria for evaluating data for generalisation borders on issues such as reliability, validity and objectivity. Reliability concerns itself with the ability to reproduce a study’s findings; in other words to arrive at the same findings should a different research employ the same or similar method. This ideology of replicability of findings is largely a feature of quantitative methodology but can be applied to qualitative research through a re-focusing on the methodological procedure.

Validity on the other hand is understood to be the ‘correctness’ and ‘precision’ of the research findings. Validity can be measured internally (that is being accurate in the investigation, eg: focus on data and process of analysis) and externally (that is applicability of the findings to both internal and external contexts).

It must be noted that the use of the terms reliability and validity here is meant to be situated “in their broadest conception [of] reliability meaning 'sustainable' and validity meaning 'well grounded' which has some relevance for qualitative research (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

Despite their time-tested applicability, the terms reliability and validity of research are of a different epistemological orientation from qualitative research (Patton, 2015) which makes their association with this study questionable. In an attempt to propose generalisations that are based on the ideologies of the qualitative research, Lincoln and

Guba (1985) proposed four kinds of generalisation for measuring the authenticity of qualitative research. These are credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability. All these, according to Lincoln and Guba, are issues of trustworthiness.

4.8.1 Credibility

Credibility encompasses checking the accuracy of what the researcher reports to have done or what he/she ought to have done. For instance, credibility provides answers to questions such as “did the researcher undertake prolonged immersion in the field, check his/her interpretations with his/her informants, and display a process of learning?” (Taylor & Medina, 2013). It is confirmed that this study achieves credibility due to the procedure for data collection undertaken which called for prolonged immersion in the field as well as the ‘emic’ perspective adopted, which also called for reporting the findings from the point of view of the research participants; thus, the participants’ story was told in the same manner as they have presented it. In effect, any interpretation presented in this study is based solely on a thick description of the way participants constructed their social meaning.

4.8.2 Dependability

Dependability “involves accounting for all the changing conditions in whatever is being studied as well as any changes in the design of the study that were needed to get a better understanding of the context” (Brown, 2005, p. 35). For dependability to be achieved the context of the study must be well defined taking cognizance of any changes or alternations that may hitherto affect the findings of the study. Dependability can also be enhanced by using different forms of triangulation, for instance methodological triangulation, multiple source triangulation, time triangulation among other types. In the current study, dependability is realized because due diligence was taken to harmonise all the sources and phases of data collection. Thus both multiple source and time triangulations were utilised to enhance the dependability of the study. It is therefore

confirmed that no considerable changes were recorded during the three phases of data collection.

4.8.3 Transferability

Transferability is the ability of the results of a study to be generalized or replicated either within the parent population or to other external contexts (Richie & Lewis, 2013). The role of the researcher in transferability is to provide detailed description on the data and procedure used in the analysis for a reader's judgement and application. The current study is able to pass the test of transferability because it provides elaborate description on the methodology, methods and analysis of the data for a reader's scrutiny. In addition, most key findings from this study re-affirm theories from similar studies, making the study transferable.

4.8.4 Confirmability

Confirmability, according to Creswell (2007), "establishes the value of the data" (p. 204). It regards every qualitative study as unique employing unique set of data which can be corroborated in similar studies. Confirmability also centres on whether "the research data can be tracked to [its] source" (Taylor & Medina, 2013); this is made possible through "thorough record keeping and preservation of data for potential inspection" (Brown, 2005, p. 32). In accordance with the norms of confirmability, the current study has meticulously taken record of every step of the research process with the help of field notes. In addition, samples of the interview transcripts, social media chats, as well as other essential parts of the data have been appended to the study for confirmation. It is again confirmed that the data for this study is authentic and will retain the same or similar results should a quasi-investigation be conducted. Also, the researcher tactfully employed the method of triangulation to corroborate the evidence emerging from the participants.

4.9 Triangulation

Triangulation is the use of different methods and sources to ensure the reliability and validity of the results from a research. “Triangulation assumes that the use of different sources of information will help both to confirm and to improve the clarity or precision, of a research finding” (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, p. 275). Triangulation in this sense serves as an external validation of the research findings. It may also be used to deepen or widen understanding of a subject. In this study, triangulation is employed not only to serve as a tool of convergence for data and findings but also to foster deeper understanding into the myth surrounding Ghanaian university students’ social media practices and the advancement or otherwise of their academic literacy skills.

Patton (2002) believes that “[i]t is in data analysis that the strategy of triangulation really pays off, not only in providing diverse ways of looking at the same phenomenon but in adding to credibility by strengthening confidence in whatever conclusions are drawn” (p. 556). Hence, an “important feature of triangulation is not the simple combination of different kinds of data, but the attempt to relate them so as to counteract the threats to validity identified in each” (Fielding & Fielding, 1986, p.31).

4.9.1 Types of triangulation

There are variants of triangulation used in qualitative research to enhance the credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability of research. Some of these include the following:

- Methods triangulation: comparing data generated by different methods (e.g. qualitative and quantitative)
- Source triangulation: comparing data from different qualitative methods (e.g. observations, interviews, documented accounts)
- Multiple analysis triangulation: using different observers, interviewers, analysts to compare and check data collection and interpretation
- Theory triangulation: looking at data from different theoretical perspectives

- Time triangulation: involves gathering data on multiple occasions (e.g., at the beginning, middle, and end of a school year)
- Location triangulation: involves gathering data at multiple sites (e.g. three different schools)
- Investigator triangulation: involves using multiple researchers to interpret the data in order to minimize and understand any differences/biases the researchers may have.

(Patton, 2002; Brown, 2005, pp. 31- 32)

This study employs triangulation of sources as well as time triangulation. Triangulation of sources is also known as data triangulation (Denzin, 1989). In the current study, data from different qualitative methods: observation, interview and questionnaire are utilised. The rationale is to, as it were, ‘double check’ the evidence provided by the phenomenon under study in a reliable and validated manner.

Also, time triangulation was used to gather data on multiple occasions. For instance, data from the social media chats were collected over two first semesters, “which helps in examining the consistency of the data and interpretations over time” (Brown, 2005, p. 31). Further, data from the key informant interviews and academic scripts were also collected sequentially.

4.10 Ethical considerations

Ethical issues are integral to the conduct of research, most especially when the study encroaches on the privacy of the subjects. Strydom (2005) defines ethics as “a set of moral principles which is suggested by an individual or group, which is subsequently widely accepted, and which offers rules and behavioural expectations about the most correct conduct towards experimental subjects and respondents, employers, sponsors, other researchers, assistants and students” (p. 69). The study is guided by ethical principles that undergird educational research as well as internet research.

Macmillan and Schumacher (1993) summarised these ethical principles into four:

- the right of subjects to privacy
- the right of subjects to remain anonymous
- the right of subjects to confidentiality and
- the right of subjects and the community to expect the researcher to be responsible (p. 243).

All the rights of the subjects were observed. An outline containing the aims of the study and the role of the participants was given out and explained thoroughly to the participants (see appendix E). Participants were not forced or coerced into the research; their participation in the study was based solely on their own conviction, trust and willingness. Thus, subject consent was duly sought. In addition, the researcher also sought permission from the deans of students to conduct the study (see appendix C and D).

Also, to ensure the anonymity of subjects, participants were encouraged not to indicate their name or student index number on the questionnaire. Similarly, pseudo names were used to identify the respondents in the interview report. Thus, all responses were kept confidential.

Finally, the participants were assured that the findings from the study will feed back, directly or indirectly, into the teaching and designing of course materials for the academic literacy programmes in both institutions.

4.11 Chapter summary

This chapter reported on the philosophical beliefs that guided the study. It also talked about how the study was conducted and the tools used in gathering the evidence for the study. In addition, it reported on the study's sampling and how trustworthiness and ethical considerations were observed. The next chapter presents the analysis of the data.

CHAPTER FIVE

PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF DATA (1)

5.0 Introduction

This chapter presents, analyses and discusses the data that drive the study. The source of data and process of data collection were examined in chapter four. The data for the study were guided by the research objectives and paradigms (see chapter 4). The main objective of the study (as stated in chapter one) is to investigate the emergence of social media discourse among Ghanaian university students and its implications on their acquisition of academic literacy. The study employed the qualitative approach to research and adopted a netnographic stance. Netnography is a virtual parallel approach to offline ethnographic study. As it is the best practice with (net) ethnographic studies, the research objectives and related questions are aimed at making “the most significant contribution in terms of building [net] ethnographic knowledge, developing social theory, and solving practical social problems” (Murchison, 2010, p. 38).

The investigative tools that aided in the collection of data are participant observation, field notes, semi-structured interview guide and a structured questionnaire. The structured questionnaire served as a recruitment tool to select participants for the study. Data and time triangulation were used to generate data from three sources: participants’ social media chats, key informant interviews and samples of participants’ academic scripts. Data from the social media chats provided information on students’ general online linguistic practices; whereas, the key informant interviews revealed the participants’ unique experiences associated with their social media practices.

Accordingly, the presentation and analysis of data in this chapter is categorised into two sections. The first section presents and analyses data from the research participants’ social media chats while section two centres on issues emanating from the key informant interviews. The total number of participants was one hundred and eighty eight (188), sixteen (16) out of this total number participated in the key informant interview.

5.1 Data from structured questionnaire

As indicated in chapter four, the study employed structured questionnaire as both a recruitment tool and an access point to introduce the respondents to the purpose of the research as well as usher the researcher into negotiating access into the world of knowledge and behavior of the research participants. This negotiation is important in qualitative studies in order to enter the participants' life world and acquire a thick description of his/her social, cultural and linguistic behaviour.

5.1.1 Demographic information on the participants

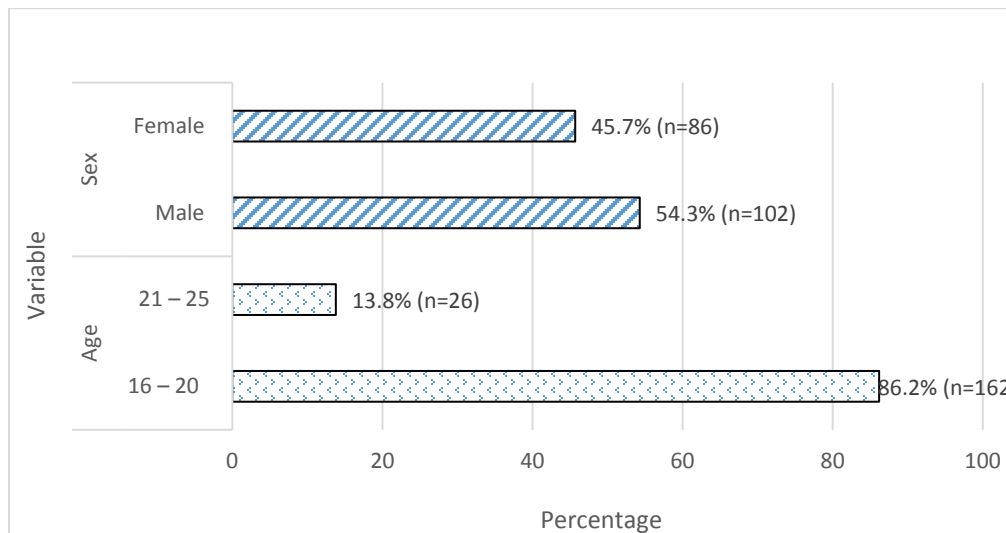


Figure 5: Demographic information on the participants

All participants were first year undergraduate students and they all had access to social media and internet, mostly through their 'smart' (mobile) phones and also through their tablets and laptops. There were more male participants, representing 54.3% of the total sample size, than females, who represent 45.7 percent. Majority of the study participants fell between the ages 16-20, representing 86.2% of the sample size.

5.2 Social media and the Ghanaian university student's linguistic choices

To a large extent, the Ghanaian university students, when interacting online, also exhibit the linguistic choices discussed in section 2.8 above, albeit with their unique linguistic situated practices owing to the affordances the over 80 indigenous languages avail to the practitioners. Such linguistic choices are evident at four distinct levels: syntax (structure), lexis, spelling, and mechanics as well as their associated sub-units. As noted in section 4.7.6 of chapter 4, the research instruments used in gathering this data are participant observation and field notes. The result is presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Ghanaian university students' linguistic choices on social media

Linguistic levels	Sub-levels
1. Syntax	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✚ Sentence types <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Truncated/fragmented sentences ▪ Structural omissions/ellipsis ▪ Run-ons ▪ Comma splices
2. Lexis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✚ A combination of letters and numerals ✚ Logographs and Pictographs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Emoticons/smiley ▪ Action descriptors ✚ Indigenous words to show emotions ✚ A combination of codes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mixed codes and switched codes

Linguistic levels	Sub-levels
3. Spelling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✚ Shortening of words <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Abbreviations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Clipping - Blending ▪ Acronyms/Initialisms ▪ Omission of letters/sounds <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Vowel reduction - Omission of consonant sounds - Omission of silent sounds - Contracted forms ✚ Non-standard spellings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Deviant spellings ▪ Homophones/graphs ▪ ‘Ghinglish’ spellings (eg: ai for yes.)
4. Mechanics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✚ Punctuation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Omission of end marks ▪ Omission of apostrophe marks which show possession ▪ Omission of commas ▪ Overuse of exclamation marks, ellipsis ▪ Misplaced punctuation marks ✚ Capitalisation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Non-recognition of proper nouns ▪ Non-capitalisation of sentence initial words ▪ Initialisms not capitalised

Source: Netnographic data, 2015: Classification of Ghanaian University students’ linguistic choices on social media.

Considering the transiency of social media discourse, the classification presented in Table 5.3 above is not intended to be exhaustive in any sense; however, an adept attempt has been made to include salient exemplars of the features which reflect current practices. What makes the above classification unique is that the mode of classification differs from existing ones such as Crystal (2008) and Thurlow, Lengel and Tomic (2004).

Crystal, for instance provided six classifications but most of the items were mutually inclusive rather than being mutually exclusive. The items presented by Crystal are pictograms, logograms, initialisms, omitted letters, non-standard spellings, and shortenings. Despite the examples Crystal cited under each of these categories, there still exist some overlaps; for example, initialism can be a way of shortening and vice versa. Again, omission of letters can be a form of non-standard spelling, so can initialism and shortening be placed under non-standard spelling. While Crystal and others can be commended for the earlier classification of social media linguistic features, other existing attempts did not approach these choices in such recognisable tiered or layered format but presented the examples as isolated units (as discussed in section 4.7.6 of chapter 4).

5.3 Data from semi-structured interviews

This section presents data from semi-structured interviews conducted on sixteen (16) active social media patrons as discussed in section 4.7.6. The emerging issues from the semi-structured interview were divided into eight (8) thematic areas, which include motivation for engaging in social media and social media discourse, amount of time spent on social media communication and on academic work, infiltration of social media language into academic writing, social media for pedagogical purposes, among others. Details of each theme are presented in the ensuing sub-sections.

5.3.1 Motivation for using social media

Almost all respondents reported they had social media in mind when purchasing their preferred phones. Those who had no preference at the initial stages eventually deemed it necessary to own or replace their phones with more advanced versions that support social media. This finding concurs with existing literature which reported that, some 88% of young adults either possess smartphones or have access to smartphones (Lenhart, 2015) and typically for the purpose of social media usage. Students ascribed several reasons as their motivation for using social media. Prominent among these reasons are

the quest to keep connected with friends across the world in a more cheaper, faster and convenient way; keeping track of current information by reading news, watching videos online; avoidance of boredom and for research purposes. Box 1 presents comments from some study respondents.

Box 1: Students' motivation for using social media

"I'm able to reach people faster and because of social media nowadays I don't make calls; it's really helpful..."

"I get to read news online and watch videos to make me not feel bored sometimes"

"..... mostly social media keeps me away from boredom and also any information that I need I also get it there"

"..... I will say mostly I use social media for my education, entertainment and news purposes and also chatting with friends"

"I use social media for research.....say when a question or a note is given I go onto the internet to explore more and read around so I can make substantive notes on the subject matter"

"I use social media to meet and make more friends or people whom so many years after school or maybe after a long period I haven't heard from and also to advertise business"

"It helps me link up with especially friends since you can't call all the time; so social media really helps with linking friends and other equally important matters...and also with school work, you're able to get information from social media group"

Three subthemes can be drawn from this: in this case, social media serves as a source of gathering information, communication and entertainment. Among these three, communication is more prominent. Studies show that young adults with smartphones engage largely in various modes of communication. Among the various communicative strategies engaged in, texting has been reported as the primary mode of communication with about 90% of young adults who use social media exchanging texts (Lenhart, 2015). However, Bridgestock (2013), based on an earlier survey of what drives students' social media usage, found that, globally, the drive to keep up to date is the most common reason why students use social media. Despite this finding, Bridgestock discovered through a region by region analysis that the motivational factors of social media usage among students differ largely. For instance, whereas students in Latin America were driven by

interest, and students from Asia by the opportunity to express their views, students from Africa had been establishing useful connections as their primary driving force for engaging in social media.

As a technological tool, the user satisfaction indicators undergirding each of the subthemes above are affordability, convenience and time saving. For instance, social media communication, comparatively, is cheaper than traditional telecommunication and postage services. In addition, most social media gadgets are portable; thus they can be conveniently managed. Finally, the cost associated with maintaining a social media account is minimal yet effective; that is a major pull factor for social media patrons.

5.3.2 Motivation for using social media language

Most respondents could not clearly recall their motivation for initiating the use of social media language. That notwithstanding, while some traced it to natural tendencies, others attributed it to it being necessary to enable them fit into a particular social media caucus. However, it was certain that most students were inspired by their peers within a social media grouping to use social media language and most of the specific language choices are often by and large peculiar to such groups. Thus using such social media language stems from the desire to gain acceptance in the virtual group one belongs to. Such linguistic choices originate as individual novelties by seemingly influential members of the group and along the line they are unconsciously adopted by other members of the group and which eventually become members' in-group identity markers. Some examples include ayt "alright"; dat or dah or d@ "that"; gwl or gul "girl"; samtyms "sometimes"; 10x "thanks".

In addition to those social media lexical items which are peculiar to the study respondents and their circle of friends, study respondents also adopt some universal slangs that are used within a wider context, even extending outside Ghana. For instance, OMG "Oh my God"; ROTF "rolling on the floor"; LMAO "laughing my ass out". These examples have almost become standard universal conventions which either have been in existence

before the emergence of social media discourse among Ghanaian university students or, though relatively new, are codes trending among their friends, both home and abroad. A third likely source of some aspects of respondents' social media linguistic choices originate from the local or indigenous languages. For example, 'yoo' meaning "okay"; 'wai' for "alright or okay".

Interestingly, Standard English grammar was regarded secondary to social media language by study respondents, especially among friends. That is, it was discovered that students who used correct English grammar tend to confuse their friends and consume time during discussions on social media. For that matter, social media language such as text messaging language is the most acceptable and understandable means of interacting among peers. Some social media linguistic choices commonly employed include KMT meaning "kiss my teeth" or "commot for there", TYLJ meaning "thank you lord Jesus", 'lol' for laugh out loud or lots of love, among other choices. Study respondents reported that they perceive such method or language as a quick and easy way of interacting with their peers.

That notwithstanding, respondents also indicated that other factors such as whom they are chatting with (that is the addressee or the intended addressee) and the purpose of interaction influence their tone (formal or informal) and or the use of social media language. This finding concurs with Herring's (2007) observation that interactors' choice of language on social media is to some extent influenced by Del Hyme's (1974) ethnography of communication. Study participants reported they switch from social media text messaging to correct grammatical expressions and spellings during formal interactions on social media. To this end, most respondents' main communicative approach with elderly people outside of their social class could range between semi-formal to formal. Box 2 presents some comments expressed by study respondents.

Box 2: Motivation for using social media language

"I can't say a particular person introduced me, I think it's just one of those random words you find around and you start using them"

“...okay erm, one, to make - to enhance communication that’s why one may prefer to use such language and also to prevent all other forms of formality and what have you...yeah maybe going the normal way someone might tag you as something else maybe you feel you are book long or something”

“With the issue of the vocabulary, most of my friends find it difficult to understand you when you use correct grammar; that’s why I use the social media language because it is easy to understand by everybody within my friendship circle”

“Sometimes my friends will complain that I spend a lot of time typing my words so I adapted to the way they write it in the short format. Sometimes I will write something and they will say they don’t understand it”

“Depending on who ever I am chatting with that is how I use social media languages. If I am chatting with some friends I use it and there are some friends who don’t want to use the text messaging language so I don’t...also, especially when you are texting or you are chatting with maybe my lecturer, I don’t use it...text message writing is normally among we friends and students”

Contrary to the perception that social media language appears seemingly unintelligible to most people, the findings of the study have revealed that practitioners of social media do, to a great extent, understand the language of social media. It has also been discovered that whether social media language is being used consciously or not, there are five underlying factors that drive it: time saving, clarity, recipient oriented, context specific and convenience. So, for instance, the decision to use ‘doa’ or ‘Doa’ is driven by the fact that it is convenient, time saving, easily understood by the recipient taking into consideration the context of usage. Thus, ‘doa’ could either mean “*date of admission*” or “*dead on arrival*”. This debunks the notion that social media language is ambiguous and unintelligible.

Also, a close observation revealed that, most often, monosyllabic and disyllabic words are easily reduced into text messaging language by way of abbreviation. However, complex, unfamiliar, and polysyllabic words are not likely to be abbreviated by an average social media texter. The reason being that *‘shortening such long words [polysyllabic words] is like almost writing the full words and doesn’t serve its purpose of saving time’*, one of the study respondents recalled. This account reiterates the understanding that the use of abbreviations and other social media linguistic choices is conscious and it is guided by the principles of convenience and intelligibility.

In addition, social media language models on pseudo phonetic transcription. In that patrons attempt to represent speech based on not necessarily how the sounds are articulated but on how they are perceived in auditory terms. This phenomenon is highly subjective and idiosyncratic. For instance, in the word ‘think’ the initial sound /θ/ could be replaced with either the sound /t/ or /f/. While the former could be traced to local language interference which sometimes occurs in the variety of English in Ghana, the latter lacks this theoretical basis and could only be attributed to hearer perception.

Comparatively, vowel sounds tend out to be omitted more than consonant sounds, but where necessary, the decision as to which sound should be elided may affect a neighbouring consonant sound. An example is using, for instance, *er’1* in place of *everyone*; *’ayt’* or *’aiee’* for *alright*.

Another linguistic feature which is common with written language but often negligible in social media communication is punctuation. In the data observed, punctuations were never or rarely used. As a result, words and sentences run on as the users focus on communicating their thoughts with little attention on the vehicle that transmits those thoughts. This echoes the discussion in section 2.8 as to whether social media discourse should be regarded as a form of speech or writing mediated by technology (Murray 1990; Ferrara, Brunner & Whitemore 1991; Maynor, 1994; Herring, 2007). End marks and capitalisation are the common punctuation marks that are often ignored.

Interestingly on social media not only words are abbreviated, phrases as well as whole clauses or sentences could also be abbreviated. The abbreviated phrase or clause could be reduced to a special word form constituted by the initial sounds or their pro-forms, of the given words. Box 3 presents some of these examples.

Box 3: Sample truncated phrases and sentences

’1wcul’ – I will see you later.
’ddisy’ –The day is still young.

'WTG' – We thank God.

"IMU" – I miss you.

"MOG" – Man of God

"DW" – Don't worry.

5.3.3 The preference for predictive texting and social media language over formal language

Even though study participants agreed predictive text messaging allows for quick messaging and interaction, most of them prefer social media language because of its flexibility. While a few students religiously use predictive text messaging as a form of interaction on social media, for speed and convenience reasons, averagely their preference is for social media language. Therefore, social media language, more or less, is a default means of communication among young peers. One observed reason why respondents prefer to use social media language is because of their inability to spell certain words. In such instances, a wrongly spelt word is acknowledged and regarded a novelty.

Besides, there is a general view that predictive texting results in formal writing (Ling, 2007). So respondents who do not want to sound formal on social media avoid using it. Also, some respondents observed that the use of predictive texting aside it making their interaction look more formal also results into the Cupertino effect, where an alternative word, different in scope and meaning from the intended word, could be mistakenly selected from the range of words displayed.

In addition, length of texts also determines whether it is necessary to use predictive texting or not. Thus, the longer the text the more likely is the texter to rely on predictive texting. In such cases, respondents admitted that predictive words are used alongside social

media truncated words. A more advanced trend in predictive texting is the tendency for texters to programme their own words in their in-built phone dictionary, which can later be retrieved as predictive texts.

As far as predictive texting is concerned, Waldron, Kemp and Wood (2015) have identified three types of texters based on the cognitive processes exhibited by each of them. The first group is those who use predictive texts with the necessary in-built punctuations and capitalisation. Such people are exposed to the correct conventions of writing as regards spelling, punctuation and capitalisation. The second group are those who do not use predictive texting but take time to input punctuations, capitalisation and correct spellings when texting. This second group of texters, according to Waldron, Kemp and Wood (2015), are both thinking about and exposed to the correct versions of written language.

The third group, however, include texters who neither use predictive texts nor punctuations, capitalisation, and or correct spellings. Cognitively, since there is no conscious effort on the part of this third group to learn the correct form of writing, as learners, they receive limited exposure to conventional writing. Considered from a different point of view, both predictive texting and social media language favour speed over accuracy (Housley, 2016), therefore overly depending on them may have serious consequences on learners. Whereas young learners may be unable to consolidate grammatical rules as well as conventions of writing, adult learners may forget writing skills that have been learnt. Some views of study respondents on this subject are presented in Box 4 below.

Box 4: The preference for predictive texting and social media language over formal language

"I have been using predictive words when I started using WhatsApp but I deactivated that platform so I can use the text messaging languages to make it faster and to enjoy chatting"

"Yeah madam I always use them [predictive texts]... okay it helps my typing to go fast because in a situation where I have to type a long word and at the moment I start to use err typing, the full word will come I will just type on it for me to be fast on my typing skills".

“not always ...with errm with chatting with friends because of this shorthand message I don't use them but in trying to go formal that's when I use predictive texts”

“no please I don't use predictive texts... errm because sometimes what it might predict for you, the word it might predict for you may not be the actual word you want to use”

“Yeah when am chatting officially with a formal person... that is when I make use of that text but when am chatting with my friends, I prefer using the social media language ...errr because it's simple”

“not all the time, depending on the keyboard I'm using so not all the time...it's mostly when I'm on official platforms or official groups that's when I use the google keyboard and that one that they suggest the text ... the other keyboards I type short hands most times unless it's an official message maybe the person I'm chatting or the platform I'm on but if it's my friends that understand my type of questions then is short hand”

“Predictive text...yeah I do make use of them. I am not somebody that makes (sic) much use of the social media language although I do use them but in terms of what, talking of the time frame as I said earlier on where the time will be consuming for me I must say I really write the word in full because once you type it will give you a list of word options...”

“I think maybe I'm using the wrong word so the machine will correct them for you so I think that's the right word”

“...because like, errrm sometimes I try to write short hands but with the errh like the abbreviated form of words sometimes it is like ambiguity to some of my friends sometimes... it becomes ambiguous to some of my friends... yeah they don't get it so like if I am just typing and the word I want to use just appears I will just choose that one and I am good to go?”

5.3.4 Average number of hours spent on social media communication

On the average, respondents indicated they spend 4 hours daily on social media communication whereas they spend three hours on academic activities. While respondents were a bit hesitant in quantifying the number of messages received per day, it was evident that respondents on the average receive not less than fifty (50) messages and respond to or send the same or almost the same number, directly on their personal page. This is almost congruent to Lenhart's (2015) finding that a typical young adult sends and receives 30 texts per day. Also, study respondents reported that they belong to between five (5) and twenty (20) groups on social media and receive on the average five hundred (500) messages from each group in a day.

Respondents also reckoned they spend more time on social media than on academic work. This finding concurs with findings by other researchers who reported that student

social media practitioners do spend more time on social media engagements than on academic work (Anjugu, 2013; Mehmood and Taswir, 2013; Paul, Baker & Cochran, 2012; Banquil & Chua, 2009).

Furthermore, study respondents acknowledged that even though excessive time spent on social media is disruptive to their academic work, they have become addicted to constant social media chatting. Adabzadeh (2013) also observed that many student respondents have realised the potential negative effects of their excessive use of SNS on their academic achievement but lack the motivation and skills to modify their behaviour associated with excessive SNS use for non-academic purposes.

Aside chatting on social media, students spend a lot of time on watching and posting pictures and videos. This is an indication that study respondents engage in multitasks while on social media. Some common social media platforms students reportedly patronise are Instagram, WhatsApp, Facebook, Snapchat and Skype.

One common factor that permeates the data is the texting habit of the respondents. Some respondents are naturally high texters while others are average texters. It is also evident that the social groups one associates with also determine ones level of engagement on social media; that is time spent, the number of messages received and the number sent or responded to. Also averagely, the number of time students spend on the various social media platforms when on holiday increases and it is almost two times the number of hours spent when they are in school. This suggests that the demands of academic work is a determining factor of students' social media engagements; thus, the more students are engaged academically the less time they allot to social media activities.

Having said that, one elusive reason why some students, in school, spend more time on social media than they may do at home is as a result of the cost associated with internet connectivity – confirming the belief (see section 5.3.1) that affordability is a major underlying factor associated with social media usage. A study respondent reported that due to the free Wi-Fi connection on campus, she tends to spend more time on social media when on campus than when at home:

“...on campus there are much free time you can use; most times you’re with your phone so it’s easier that way and because there’s free wifi is also easier but then at home you have to use your won credit and there are other stuff you’d be doing also so it is kind of limited...”

Box 5 below presents some views on study respondents’ level of involvement on social media activities.

Box 5: Average number of hours spent on social media communication

“I will say I can spend about mmh 4 to 5 hours...”

“Errm let me say I’ll say maybe 5 hours...in a day I’ll say errm averagely I’ll say 45-50... “

“I WhatsApp maybe from around 7pm till the time I sleep, maybe 5 hours a day only... WhatsApp that’s a lot ...a whole day I send about 1000 messages... I receive a lot, from 1000 to 1500...”

“I receive several madam... I can’t count the number of messages I receive”

“...I think 3 hours or 4 hours...”

“in a day? Okay I receive I think 400 to 500 messages a day...and I send maybe 250 to 300”

“Countless, countless, countless... I have so many contacts.”

“(laughs) I think I send much messages than I receive I can’t say how... I’m very very active on WhatsApp so maybe like 300,400,500”

“...okay on the average not less than an hour... there are times where I have about 23 chats including the various groups I belong to where one group can be around 1000, 2000 messages so something like this I usually take time like midnight when I realize the noise and everything is down majority would have been in bed by then and I read and sort out the relevant ones”

“In a day I spend about close to 2 hours... That’s is WhatsApp but on Facebook, it takes me about 1hr 30 minutes on Facebook ...so roughly I spend about 3hrs 30 minutes...”

“... okay in a day I don’t send more than 300 messages... Receiving, I receive errrm I will say over 1000”

5.3.5 Average number of hours spent on academic engagements

As observed above, comparatively, with exception of attendance at regular lecture sessions, students testified they spend more time on social media than on academic activities. Due to the emergence of social media discourse, students reported they find it difficult to concentrate on studies as a result of interruptions from social media messages.

Study respondents bemoaned they are unable to ignore messages sent by friends which make them chat on social media for several hours.

It is also evident that most students do not have specific time periods allotted for serious academic work apart from the university's predetermined lecture/practical periods. This phenomenon occurs especially for the first and second quarter of the semester until when mid- semester examinations are approaching. Most students become fully engaged with academic work a little before and during end of semester examinations.

As far as the acquisition of academic literacy skills is concerned, social media serves as a distracting tool for most students. Thus, in instances where students found it difficult to forgo academic work for social media usage, they concurrently undertake both activities. This finding concurs with other studies which reported that the current net-generation of students are polychronic, thus are able to perform multitasks efficiently (Crystal, 2001); however, the tendency to engage in overlapping activities, interruptions, as well as the dovetailing of tasks tends to have adverse effects on the acquisition of academic literacy (Kaufman-Scarborough & Lindquist, 1998). The reason being that the cognitive processing abilities of these two domains greatly differ. A study respondent had this to say:

"...sometimes when you are reading your course material you can get a text from your friend which you need to reply urgently. The friend will raise a topic that you get interested in then you spend all the time texting the person before you realise you've spent much time and maybe you have an early morning lecture so you have to sleep then you forget about your book."

Another student also reported that

"errm spending time with the book is less than spending time with social media; that is, you spend much time there than you spend with the book. And that is for example when you are chatting with friends and those kind of things, it takes more of your time and you see sometimes you do nothing on social media but you will still be there even if there are no

friends to chat with, you just be there scrolling down like that. That takes much of my time than studying.”

Yet again one has this to say:

“Errm yes, yes please because sometimes you don’t intend to stay online for long you only get there and realise you are caught up in, so sometimes leaving becomes a problem because just as you are about to leave you’d have to attend to it or respond to it; you realise you end up wasting much time on social media”

As precautionary measures to limit the effect of social media engagements on academics some students mute their phones or better still put off their internet connection. Other strategies adopted by students for regulating social media usage include turning off mobile phone, total non-response to incoming messages and muting of mobile phone message notification. A study respondent noted:

“.....before I begin studying what I do is if possible I put the phone far away from me or I turn it off.”

Other students also indicated that

“When I’m doing research I put my phone on silent; I off the data and I use my computer to search for, to get my concentration on researching on the net.”

“...well it depends on, normally no when I’m studying my apps are off unless what I’m doing is in relation to some other people so mostly that is on group pages where we are discussing something”

“... at times when I’m learning I normally dedicate some 10mins to social media; that’s when I study for about 30mins and I need some 10mis break or rest, I just pick my phone and be going through the messages and be

replying messages. Normally, I mute the notification unless I take the phone before I can see the message”

“...I will be learning and a message will come and I will reply but if I see is going too much, I have to just off my phone”

“...I turn off my phone or I put my phone far away from me; there’s no way I get in touch with them”

Box 6 below presents students’ report on the average number of hours spent and the average number of messages they exchange on social media in a day.

Box 6: Average number of hours spent on academic engagements

“I spend a lot of time. Normally is from the evening around 8 to 11, maybe 3hrs 30mins to 4 hours”

“...okay at most 3 hours...”

“when I have an assignment and it means taking the entire day to do that I don’t mind but learning on my own I think I spend at most 3 hours”

“...let’s say I spend 5 hours when I’m on campus yeah... oh I yeah take a break take a break, maybe in morning I go for 2 hours and then break then in the afternoon I go for 2 hours... then in the evening maybe another 2 hours then I’m done”

“Hmm okay averagely maybe 4 hours... because most days I’m in any of my departmental libraries so I use maybe 30 mins or sometime or maybe if I’m from a class and I have to get to another and there’s sometime in between I go to the departmental library or if there’s sometime the class I’m there”

“1hr 30mins sometimes close to 2hrs, on the average”

“errm with my notebook and texts, a day I can spend like 4 hours”

“...My course book, I can say I spend 4 hours that is not constantly. I leave and do this for this time and do that for that time and come back to the books. So averagely I can say 4 hours.”

“...for me I would say for myself 2 hours”

5.3.6 Infiltration of Social Media language into academic writing

The study found that in an attempt for students to keep pace with peers’ chat on social media, they tend to use social media language. That notwithstanding, almost all study respondents understand that social media discourse is a direct opposite of academic discourse based on the informal-formal divide. In principle, students have knowledge of the distinguishing linguistic features as well as the communicative functions associated

with the two communicative domains and are committed to upholding the conventions associated with each domain. However, they testified that there is a high tendency of prolonged use of social media in negatively influencing academic communication in many ways.

For example, some study respondents reported that they sometimes inadvertently use social media language in their academic essays, especially under examinations pressure, while the majority of them conceded that nowadays it takes them a longer period to recall certain English words and their spellings which they could formerly have spelt out easily, thus prolonging their processing time. Study participants reckoned this is affecting their academic output. For those who unconsciously blend social media language with formal language in their academic writings, they reported most of the errors go uncorrected since they had either not cultivated the attitude of editing their final academic essays or they were unable to meet the demands of time.

Yet, those who were able to identify such errors and took steps at correcting them indicated such attempts often resulted in untidy cancellation of words. This according to them was disruptive to their academic works and on many occasions tend to affect grades obtained. Some observations by students are presented in Box 7 below.

Box 7: Effect of social media language use on academic writing

“..... when I am writing essays, unconsciously I use text message language and when I don't get to correct it, I end up submitting my work like that which affect my grades.”

“..... whenever I'm writing fast, I begin to write social media language”

“I inadvertently use social media language in my academic essays..... sometimes instead of writing the right word e.g. 'you' I mistakenly use the alphabet 'u’”

“Now it takes me longer period to remember the spelling of certain English words that formerly I could spell out easily..... I spell some of the words wrongly when writing exam. This is because of social media short hand type of writing and spelling of words”

“Sometimes unknowingly I realize there are one or two short hand or social media language in my academic work because I have gotten used to the short way of typing so mostly I forget some of the spelling of the words”

“.....I’ve experienced social media language infiltration... sometimes when am writing my essays I sometimes will be doing some cancellations which make my work not to be somehow looking nice, yeah.”

“In an examination because I use short cut on social media and in my notes, when I am writing fast it comes like when I realize I write short hand or social media language then I cancel it”

“.....more or less, because of the prolonged use of shortened words, when you actually want to spell right, the shortened form comes in mind but then you are aware that is not it”

“..... it happens! The way we frequently use social media language if you are writing essay and you didn’t take care you end up mixing with social media language”

“..... it takes me longer time to remember spelling of some English words because of use of shorthand on social media..... I can’t concentrate well because I need double attention for everything.”

Some study respondents indicated that in formal writing they are careful not to include such social media language. Their strategies are expressed in the following words:

“It hardly happens to me because am cautious but sometimes when am writing too fast like because I want to abreast with time and I write something like... a short way of writing “the” in my notes is “e” with an apostrophe on top so if am writing in an examination it’s so fast because that word to learn...”

“Hmm, right now errm sometimes I try to control myself because when people send me texts with those abbreviated forms am getting used to it so sometimes when am typing I try to be cautious of every word that I type because sometimes am tempted to write in the short form but am trying to restrict myself to writing it in the correct way, because sometimes it was like it was trying to affect my essay writing”

Similar studies on the negative effects of social media language on academic writing have observed that, occasionally, most social media texting freaks naturally translate social

media lingo into academic writing. Often, these occurrences happen unconsciously, almost at the blind side of the practitioners (Risto, 2014; Lytle, 2011; Tomaszewski, 2011). From the on-going discussion, it is evident that students who engage in excessive social media communication risk transferring the features of social media communication, an informal domain into academic discourse which is a formal domain. In addition, excessive use of social media language slows down students' intellectual pace since they require longer processing periods to be able to express themselves in the appropriate academic language.

5.3.7 Students' use of social media for academic purposes

Despite its seemingly endless adverse effects on academic discourse, social media is useful in many ways. The study revealed that some students are already exploring the effective use of social media for academic purposes. A number of issues have emerged from study respondents' report, which in summary points to the fact that students have devised mainly two ways of using social media for academic purposes: post sharing (text and audio-visual content) and virtual discussions.

First of all, students indicate they take snapshots of relevant pages of textbooks and lecture notes, timetables, and other important academic notices and share with course mates and other students. Also, some students share URL links to relevant study websites with course mates. In addition, some students go to the extent of recording lecture series on their smartphones for future references, especially on topics that are deemed difficult or for sharing with colleagues who were absent at lectures.

Further, students confirmed they sometimes hold virtual academic discussions on social media. Through a variety of social media platforms, students have a wide range of academic difficulties resolved through colleagues and other friends. Participating on social media for this purpose is usually low for the first half of the semester, but during mid semester and end of semester examinations, social media groups are formed where

a number of academic issues are discussed and past questions solved and shared on the group's page.

Study respondents indicated that a considerable amount of their time is spent on social media, and considering the fact that almost all students are on social media, social media could be useful for academic work. Study participants also underscored the important role of social media as the most effective and quickest way of disseminating information on academic issues. By this, students create class platforms on social media where ideas are shared, assistance on specific topics are sought and serious academic issues are discussed. According to respondents, this form of peer to peer mediation tends to be very useful especially during examination periods. Study respondents' reports on this topic are presented in Box 8 below.

Box 8: Students' use of social media for academic purposes

"..... especially when it has to do with group assignment I prefer creating a page on WhatsApp so that we just discuss academic issues on the page after which probably we meet as a team and do the typing"

"In order to seek help with something I don't understand, I request a colleague to record an audio on the topic and post on the group page."

"errm when it comes to using social media platform to enhance my academic performance I put the chatting aspect aside and concentrate more on the research"

"Errm like when we are about to take our end of year exam like this we create a group of four in which we use to study at all times based on every subject that we learn and it helps a lot... Yeah, we assist each other. And a point that someone doesn't get clearly he posts inside for anyone who has the knowledge on it also to bring it out and it even helps us more than the lectures we even take in class."

"erm for instance I think recently our examination started where we had, I and my friends in a form of a group discussion where we had to find I mean some key terminologies in the business administration course we did that with the help of the social media"

"When it's time for exam and for example when your friend is not where you are, you try explain to her how the exam will be, and for example you solve questions... your friend will send you the question so if the need be, you call the person or you type what you think and send it to the person and you ask him if its correct and the person when it's correct will say yes and when it's not correct he or she will correct you."

"... when I'm assisting my sisters in their assignment certain things that I find it difficult I channel it to my friends through WhatsApp or just as a text message and tell them about the assignment if they have any idea."

“...it pertains to discussions most at times on our academic platforms... yes so when something to do or something I don't understand from what I've read I can ask a question on any of our platforms and PM a friend - private message a friend - and ask but not kind of academic stuff but generally maybe any kind of information you need maybe you don't know say a place on campus or something I can ask them on the platform and who ever knows it will let me know”

5.3.8 Using social media as a pedagogical tool

When asked whether they think social media could be leveraged as a pedagogical tool, most of the study participants responded in the affirmative. They expressed the view that the technological affordances associated with social media could be harnessed as teaching and study aids for both personalised and collaborative learning.

Besides, social media could provide a perfect opportunity and platform for students who are not confident to ask questions in class. It will also serve as an extension of the classroom experience. A great deal of previous research has found that social media, when properly retooled, could be used effectively for collaborative learning, to improve study time management, increase access to current resources that aid in learning and retention of knowledge, and boost introverted students' confidence (McGraw-Hill, 2015; Kholoud, Abir & Ali, 2014; Junco, 2012; Junco, et al., 2011; Kuh, 2001; Arnolds & Paulus, 2010).

Study respondents preferred social media platforms such as WhatsApp and or Facebook for this purpose because, in their view, these two platforms are the most affordable and accessible. In addition these two platforms are predominantly text based, able to accommodate other interactive tools and support private messaging options. A study respondent noted:

“WhatsApp! Quite a number I think majority of people do have it as compared to the other social media and also the way it's a bit one on one aside the group ones although there's a group you can still go back to the private messaging. If there is any issues or too much drama on the page, I can just comfortably pm the lecturer and get my answer”

Nevertheless, respondents still value face-to-face or traditional classroom interaction. They recommended that using social media as a pedagogical tool should be made to complement the activities of the traditional classroom. In effect, it should be an extension of classroom activities instead of it being a replacement of them.

Box 9: Using social media as a pedagogical tool

“Mostly the lecture hours are not enough so we are not able to ask questionssometimes the TAs are not able to answer the questions to your understanding so we prefer the lecturers. If there is a page on Facebook or WhatsApp, with a lecturer and all students, if a student have any complains or questions, he or she can ask. The WhatsApp also the same with groups’ information can get across quickly, for example course outline.”

“Like for instance somebody might be in a lecture room, he is having a problem with a question, he is the type of person who cannot ask questions in class so I think if we create something like a group discussion that his lecturer will be invited then the person will feel at ease to post in any question he thinks is bothering him so that the lecturer will be able to answer him or her.”

“..... to some extent because of the widespread use of social media among students, I think one way or the other if it can be incorporated into academic teaching it will ease teaching and enhance studies.”

“okay, yes because I mean sometimes students don’t really have, what do we call it this, boldness or courage to ask questions before lecturers; that’s one on one so the social media will offer them the opportunity or the platform to be able to ask questions where the lecturer is not closer to them...”

“I mean for sitting in the classroom teaching and learning I don’t think that will be well till we send it to social media for example when a teacher gives us assignment or any other thing and project work for that one it can be done on the social media but in class I don’t think so, for example student not coming to the lecture hall, a lecturer could set up a page on social media so that they do the quiz and learning there but I don’t think that will help us but coming to class to meet the lecture that one will help.”

“yes again to some extent because of the frequent use of social media and nowadays almost everybody is familiar to the use of social media and I think one way or the other if they can incorporate it[teaching and learning] into the social media I think it will enhance faster studies and easy deliverance”

“I think with the use of WhatsApp we can create a group, an academic group so if any discussion we can probably schedule a time maybe by 9:30am members of the group should be online so that discussion can go on so that they can be responding to the discussion and if you have any question you ask”

“let’s say we have a platform just as errm the academic writing platform people will be able to come out with something or certain things they wouldn’t be able to say or talk about during lectures and with that since the fellow or since there isn’t that face to face interaction the fellow will come out openly to express him or herself”

5.4 Chapter summary

Specifically, this chapter provided findings that answer research questions one and two:

1. What is the nature of Ghanaian university students' linguistic practices on social media?
2. What unique experiences have Ghanaian university students gained through their interaction on social media?

In answering research question one, the social media linguistic choices by Ghanaian university students were organised at four levels: structure, lexis, spelling and mechanics. The data used for this is the netnographic data derived from daily chats on a WhatsApp platform created purposely for this study. It was found that, by and large, Ghanaian university students play into the universal cyber slang of truncating sentences, novel spellings and word choices, as well as unique and purposeful mechanical inaccuracies to communicate on social media in order to gain general acceptance and solidarity among peers.

Findings for research question two were derived from semi-structured face-to-face interviews comprising sixteen respondents of the total sample size of one hundred and eighty eight. This selection was done based on their active involvement on the WhatsApp page created purposely for the study. The data was coded using the qualitative analysis software, Nvivo. Eight (8) thematic areas emerged from the interview. They are motivation for using social media, motivation for using social media language, the preference for predictive texting and social media language over formal language, average number of hours spent on social media communication, average number of hours spent on academic engagements, infiltration of Social Media language into academic writing, students' use of social media for academic purposes, and using social media as a pedagogical tool.

Findings for research questions three and four are presented, analysed and discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER SIX

PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF DATA (2)

6.0 Introduction

This is the second analysis chapter of the study which seeks to answer research questions three and four. The research questions are restated here as follows:

Research question three:

To what extent does language use in social media by Ghanaian university students affect their acquisition of academic literacy skills?

Research question four:

How can social media be used as an assistive pedagogical tool in advancing Ghanaian university students' acquisition of academic literacy?

Accordingly, the chapter is divided into two main sections. The first section engages respondents' academic scripts in a bid to establish the connection, if any, between social media discourse and the acquisition of academic literacy. As discussed in chapter three section 3.4, studies on academic literacy have largely identified three areas as constituting academic literacy: the linguistic, cognitive, and sociocultural/psychological. The focus of this study, with regard to the acquisition of academic literacy skills, however, is on the linguistic dimension or criterion of assessing academic literacy – that is to say those general but unique linguistic features, involving inter academic disciplines, which characterise or project academic discourse as a demonstration of shared literacy.

To this extent, students are expected to demonstrate the ability to compose a meaningful academic essay. Essentially, the students are expected to organise their thoughts in a clear, coherent and logical manner, demonstrate the ability to use appropriate vocabulary and grammatical constructions, as well as demonstrate an understanding of relevant

content. A student who falls short of this criterion is unable to gain the full range of marks allocated for the essay.

The rubric used in assessing this portion of the data is modelled on Scarcella's (2003) classification of Academic English. Scarcella identified five linguistic dimensions of academic English. They are the phonological, lexical, grammatical, sociolinguistic and discourse dimensions. This study has identified three of the dimensions – phonological, lexical and grammatical – as constituting lower order linguistic features of academic English and communication and the last two – sociolinguistic and discourse features – as higher order linguistic markers of academic communication. The rationale was to build upon the concepts of Scarcella's existing model and to adapt it for the needs of the current study. The modified rubric made up of the linguistic indicators, together with their sub-classifications is summarised in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Linguistic indicators of academic literacy

Linguistic levels	Specific linguistic features
<i>Lower order elements</i>	
Phonological indicators	Phonologically conditioned Spelling (sound recognition) Homophonous words
Lexical indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Academic vrs non-academic words/phrases ▪ Contracted forms
Grammatical indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sentence structures <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Sentence Fragments ○ Comma splices ○ Modification ○ Parallelism ○ Run-on sentences ▪ Mechanics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Concord (subject-verb, Pronoun reference, etc.) ○ Spelling and capitalisation ○ Punctuation ○ Tenses ○ Shifts

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Comparative forms ○ Noun system: formation of plural, the use of articles/determiners
<i>Higher order elements</i>	
Sociolinguistic indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ability to operate academic language functions such as signalling cause and effect, comparison, contrast, description, thesis and proof, explanation, synthesis, etc. ▪ Ensuring brevity, precision, unity, completeness
Discourse indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Effective introduction (with background information and thesis statement) ▪ Main section (topic sentences plus supporting sentences, cohesive devices) ▪ Effective conclusion/summary of the essay ▪ Logical coherence

It must be pointed out that the range of specific or subcategory linguistic features, as outlined here, cannot be said to be exhaustive as there may be several elements that could represent a particular linguistic indicator. However, the ones presented here are those that are evident in the data used for the current study. It is questionable whether a topic plays any role in giving prominence to certain linguistic choices. There is a strong indication here to suggest that the topic of the essay is central to the choice of language and style of the academic essay. Also in the literature, topics have been identified as being capable of modifying writing styles and diction as a simple essay topic: “Japanese students have no dreams. Do you agree or disagree?”, as reported by Murrow (2005) was able to expose student’s poor ability in the use of negative statements more than any other language problem.

Each linguistic feature was subjected to frequency counts and each linguistic subcategory was meticulously reviewed at least three consecutive times so as to conclude on its prevalence as well as effect on the overall assessment of the academic essay. Those linguistic features that were deemed insignificant, as far as their reoccurrence in the data is concerned, were ignored. In addition, some examples fit into multiple categories. For

example, the word, 'ones', which based on the context should have been 'one's', could be influenced by pronunciation; it could also be a punctuation problem.

The next section provides results and discussion on each linguistic indicator and its subcategories as evident in the academic essays of the sixteen respondents (see chapter 4, section 4.7.6).

6.1 Results and discussion of students' academic essays

As indicated in section 6.0 above, the academic essays were first subjected to thorough reading. Then, linguistic themes that emerged were identified and categorised into two: lower order elements and higher order elements. The lower order elements are those who occur at the sentence level and below. The higher order elements are those that occur beyond the sentence level – the paragraph and beyond. The lower order elements identified in the essays were discussed under three themes: phonological, lexical and grammatical units. Under the higher order level, two units have been identified: sociolinguistic and discourse. However, the essay discusses only the discourse unit. This is because the sociolinguistic unit is regarded here as the embodiment of all the other units. In that, the sociolinguistic knowledge is the ability of the language user to demonstrate what is expected of him or her in the academic discourse community, including how to express him or herself: the choice of words, tone of voice, style and structure of writing.

In other words, the sociolinguistic competence is more or less the unwritten conventions that form the basis of all other linguistic competences, in that developing the awareness and internalising the norms that inform the discourse community and implementing them is a demonstration of shared knowledge. In summary, a student who is sociolinguistically competent will be able to produce meaningful sentences, choose appropriate words based on the discourse type, and master a range of language functions (Freedman & Medway, 1994; Swales, 1990; Scarcella, 2003).

6.1.2 Phonological competence

The phonological competence as employed in this study is the student's ability to decipher discrete speech sounds. It includes the ability to showcase enough knowledge on phonological words and orthographic words. Since social media uses more of phonological words, the student's competence in spelling both simple and complex words, which involve sound/letter recognition is key. Phonological competence in this context also involves the ability to recognise and use homophonous words with ease. Table 5 presents respondents' performance on phonological competence. It first identifies the total number of words in the essay and then the number that were spelt phonetically wrongly.

Table 5: Phonological Indicator

Respondents	Total No. of words	No. spelt Phonologically Correctly	%	No. spelt Phonologically Wrongly	%
R1	312	304	97.4	8	2.6
R2	440	436	99.0	4	1.0
R3	303	296	97.6	7	2.4
R4	535	532	99.4	3	0.6
R5	455	451	99.1	4	0.9
R6	271	239	88.2	32	11.8
R7	401	397	99.0	4	1.0
R8	267	263	98.5	4	1.5
R9	201	191	95.0	10	5.0
R10	287	277	96.5	10	3.5
R11	337	335	99.4	2	0.6
R12	317	315	99.4	2	0.6
R13	319	309	96.9	10	3.1
R14	461	459	99.6	2	0.4

Respondents	Total No. of words	No. spelt Phonologically Correctly	%	No. spelt Phonologically Wrongly	%
R15	197	193	98.0	4	2.0
R16	266	252	94.7	14	5.3
Total	5369	5250	97.8	119	2.2

From Table 5, it could be seen that even though students engage in phonetics and phonemic spellings on social media, it did not have so much adverse effect on their academic discourse. This is an indication that the students were conscious of the formal – informal divide of language use as far as their academic communication is concerned. This finding neither confirms nor contradicts earlier findings which provide general report on the positive impact of texting and social media usage on the spelling abilities of younger learners (Plester, et al., 2009; 2008;), as well as negative or causal impacts (Wood, et al., 2011; Rosen, Chang, Erwin, Carrier & Cheever, 2010). However, most of these studies were unable to observe the subjects over a prolonged time while others focus on either young students or even ‘toddler netizens’ (Luke, 1999). What the findings of the current study rather suggests is that the few examples are indications that the situation, if not controlled at the individual level, has the tendency of seeping into academic communication, since no single individual, according to the data, was able to record 0% for the feature.

A number of phonologically conditioned spelling conventions were identified but the selection was based on multiple occurrences. Those that occurred only once were treated as a possible ‘slip of the pen’, but a reoccurrence of the error is an indication of the students’ ways of spelling a particular word. However, the danger the exclusion of non-reoccurred words pose is the deficit in ascertaining the actual phonological spelling characteristics of the students in instances where the word occurs only once in the essay.

Due to the lack of possible re-occurrence of the words, it may seem hasty to conclude that it is an error or a mistake. That notwithstanding, phonologically conditioned spelling mishaps are to be treated as errors and not mistakes. This is due to the fact that such spelling problems become evident as a result of the writer’s idiosyncratic

mispronunciation of certain words and their associated sound assignments which are transferred into writing, an instance of perception directly feeding orthographic production (Jones, 2002). Samples of the phonological spellings are presented on Table 6 below.

Table 6: Examples of Phonological Spellings

Examples	Sample Sentences	Correct form
'refering'	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The internet helps the students in many ways...refering to online dictionary. 2. Formerly, they refered to all other networks. 	Referring
'Cotation'	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Use a cotation mark. 2. To avoid plagiarism, put all cotations in inverted commas 	Quotation
'Benefit'	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Because many students don't make the use of the net to benifit them... 2. ...he/she rather looks at things which don't benefit them... 	Benefit
'Carriculum'	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. University education over the past decade has not seen some lights in its academic carriculum activities. 2. It has affected student negatively in their carriculum activities. 	curriculum
'Unecessary'	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Many students don't make the ...they spend it on unecessary things. 2. ...they only misuse it for their unecessary desire. 	Unnecessary
'Ele's'	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Plagiarism is taking someone ele's words or ideas... 2. It is the act of copying someone ele's work, ideas, ... 	else's
'Trys'	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reviewing is where one trys to question... 2. When reflecting, the reader trys to understand the text better. 	Tries
'Were'	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. This is the process were after reading the person should be able to recite the words. 2. It is were after the person has surveyed the text... 	Where
'Ambigious'	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The reason is that they use sentences full of jargons 	Ambiguous

	<p>and ambiguous words.</p> <p>2. The statement was very ambiguous.</p>	
'Studing'	<p>1. The Academic Writing course has changed my habit of studing...</p> <p>2. My style of studing has been changed due to...</p>	Studying

Certain phonological features such as letter/number homophones (for example gr8, 2d), as reported by some researchers were not encountered. Also, there were no emoticons or smileys; neither were there typographic forms such as onomatopoeic spellings (yay!, haha), nor accent stylisations (ello/hello) evident, as recorded in previous research (see Lyddy, et. al, 2014; Crystal, 2008; Thurlow & Brown, 2003). There is, however, one instance of the use of the symbol '&', representing the word 'and'. The symbol was used by respondent two (2) in the example, "...distinction between cats & dogs..." .

Also, evident in the data are complex phonological processes like consonant cluster reduction, as usually present in social media discourse (Eisenstein, 2013); however, these instances occur at word medial positions rather than at word final positions. Some examples from the data include 'joting, were, subjet, studing, litle' for 'jotting', 'where', 'subject', 'little'. It must, however, be mentioned that the reduction in consonant cluster is at the superficial level involving, mostly, the deletion of some or perceived phonologically redundant consonant sounds. It must be noted that even though there are several instances of final consonant deletion, these were mere morphosyntactic instances and have little to do with phonology.

This finding partly contradicts prior conclusions that "nonstandard phonological features rarely occur in writing, even when these features are extremely frequent in the oral dialect of the writer" (Whiteman, 1982, p. 6), as well as Thompson, Craig and Washington's (2004) finding on the non-observance of phonological features, except for morphosyntactic features, in the written discourse of their third-grade students who were also speakers of African American English (AAE). As rightly observed by Eisenstein (2013), these studies were conducted prior to the emergence of social media discourse,

when these phonological spellings were purely spoken features but in the wake of social media such features are not solely the preserve of the spoken medium but also the written medium by way of chat-texting; therefore, their transferability rate from one written medium to the other, if not controlled, is high.

With regard to vowel sounds, what is mainly evident is the vowel sound substitution involving the letter ‘e’ and the sound /i/ and the letter ‘u’ and the corresponding sound /a/, compelling the letter ‘u’ to be spelt in a seemingly ‘a’ form in the same way as it sounds. Some examples seen in the data are “immediatly, benifit, theoritical, and ambiguous”.

6.1.3 Grammatical Competence

Grammatical competence as employed in this study entails knowledge of the morphosyntactic language elements. It pertains to the student’s ability to construct grammatically meaningful sentences. It may include but not limited to adequate use of sentence structure, spelling and capitalisation, punctuation. Under the grammatical indicator, two broader subcategories – sentence structure and mechanics – were identified as prevalent and subsequently analysed and discussed. These two were further divided into their respective subcategories. Under sentence structure, five subcategories were discussed according to the frequency of occurrence: sentence fragments, run-on sentences, comma splices, faulty parallelism and modification (misplaced and dangling). Under mechanics, three subcategories were identified as problematic: concord (involving subject verb agreement and pronoun antecedent), faulty punctuation, and morphosyntactic spelling and capitalisation. The next section discusses these language problems into detail.

6.1.3.1 Sentence structure

This section accounts for the total number of sentences produced by each respondent, using a frequency count, supported by Nvivo. After identifying the total number of

sentences, sentences with faulty structures were segregated from those with no faulty structures and their percentages found. This is presented in Table 7 below.

Table 7: Sentence structure

Respondents	Total No. of sentences	No. of correct sentences	%	No. of faulty sentences	%
R1	23	19	82.7	4	17.3
R2	23	15	65.3	8	34.7
R3	15	3	20.0	12	80.0
R4	25	23	92.0	2	8.0
R5	20	11	55.0	9	45.0
R6	14	4	28.5	10	71.5
R7	17	9	52.9	8	47.1
R8	20	11	55.0	9	45.0
R9	25	7	28.0	18	72.0
R10	21	10	47.6	11	52.4
R11	13	04	30.7	9	69.3
R12	20	2	10.0	18	90.0
R13	24	13	54.2	11	45.8
R14	23	14	60.8	9	39.1
R15	13	4	30.7	9	69.3
R16	25	13	52.0	12	48.0
Total	321	162	50.5	159	49.5

Table 7 shows the total number of sentences generated by all sixteen respondents. In all, 321 sentences were composed ranging from simple to compound-complex sentences. Averagely, a student used not less than fifteen sentences and not more than twenty five sentences to compose an essay. Respondents who had less than fifteen sentences usually presented incomplete essays, probably due to time constraints or any other reason. Apart from those who had less than 15 sentences, usually, the less number of sentences, the more complex the structure of the sentences, as such essays contained more complex and compound-complex sentences. In the same vein, the more sentences an essay contains, the more simple the structure.

There seems to be a direct, unmediated relationship between structural complexity and faulty structures. What this means is that the more complex the structure, the more faulty the sentence. Carpenter (2014) has observed that one of the attributes of social media, which when measured with academic communication may be deemed as negative, is that social media has increasingly promoted text-based communication and does not give that benefit to patrons to make time for long thoughts, and that is likely to influence other forms of writing.

Out of the 321 sentences, almost half (49.5%) was identified as faulty. It is clear that respondents 9 and 11 committed the most sentence errors with 18 faulty sentences each, out of a total of 25 and 20 sentences, in their respective essays.

Five structural errors were analysed. They are sentence fragments, run-on sentences, comma splices, faulty parallelism and modification (misplaced and dangling). Among these, sentence fragment, run-on sentences and comma splices seem to characterise the data. All these have the use of wrong punctuation marks as the greatest underlying element. Although punctuation errors and concord are also problems associated with sentences they have not been placed under the structural errors in this section (See section 6.1.3.3 for a detailed discussion on these). Exploring further, it was found that sentence fragment seems to be the highest structural error committed by the respondents. This is followed by run-on sentences and comma splices. This finding is shown in the Figure 6 below.

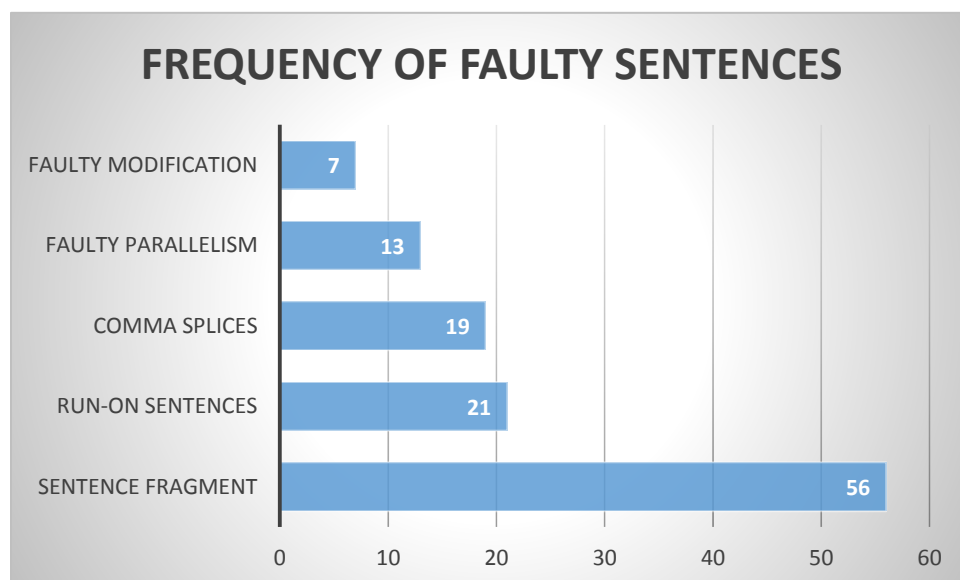


Figure 6: Frequency of faulty sentences

From Figure 6, it is evident that, in all, there were 56 errors involving sentence fragment while run-on sentences and comma splices were 21 and 19. The least structural error type is that involving dangling and misplaced modifiers. The trend regarding the excessive use of sentence fragments, run-on sentences and comma splices is justifiable. Unlike Academic writing which is noted to involve the use of complex meaningful structures (Jordon, 1992; Oshima, & Hogue, 1991), social media usually uses truncated sentences (Crystal, 2008) that do not require nominalisation or ranking of one's thoughts into meaningful layers but into simple and reduced sentences. Sentence fragments, run-on sentences and comma splices are informal, spontaneous speech which are highly conversational. Thus, the use of such sentences in academic writing is an indication of informality.

The influx of such usages in academic discourse among the respondents is as a result of the usurping 'chat-text' mode of social media which is taking precedence over other modes of interaction, including formal writing. Lakoff (2016) believes that in speech and social media, such structural errors are "effective discourse mechanisms". In the case of sentence fragments for instance, it is a natural tendency that an addressee is able to complete an addressor's sentence, either by saying it aloud or silently. It shows how cooperative the speakers are especially at a time when words are "flying by quickly" (Lakoff, 2016, p.1). Mostly, sentence fragments in social media are accounted for by the interactive use of @ or #, among other symbols (At the time of collecting this data for the study, the icon @ is what was in vogue).

This finding of the study also confirms observations that messages in social media, mostly in synchronous instances, are deliberately broken into chunks or 'posting units' as a means of mimicking speech and keeping pace with the interaction (Herring & Androutsopoulos, 2015; Baron, 2010). Several studies have shown that more complex messages tend to be constructed in asynchronous instances (Condon & Cech, 2010; Herring, 2011; 1996). Obviously, time and space are of essence here. What is, however,

not known and needs to be investigated is whether students are bound to produce such speech-like structures in term papers and projects, for instance, since both types of writing have the luxury of time and space.

With comma splice, for example, the writer intuitively recognises that a pause is needed; yet, he or she is unable to deploy the appropriate punctuation mark to signal that pause. Due to the level of simplicity in structure and sometimes in word order, usually ideas encoded in such messages are semantically recoverable (Lyddy, et. al, 2014).

6.1.3.2 Concord

In addition to structure, agreement issues between the subject and the verb forms and pronouns and their antecedents were also examined. The analysis of concord was based on the total number required as suggested by the sentences and the number either misused or omitted, vis-à-vis the number used correctly. It must be noted that the total number of concord required as presented here far outnumbered the total number of sentences the respective respondents' essays contained. This instance is because some of the sentences are compound whereas others are complex and compound complex in structure resulting in complex concord issues. Table 8 presents these findings.

Table 8: Grammatical Indicator: Concord

Respondents	Total required	No. used correctly	%	No. misused or omitted	%
R1	36	30	83.4	6	16.6
R2	50	40	80.0	10	20.0
R3	40	20	50.0	20	50.0
R4	35	32	91.4	3	8.6
R5	38	25	65.8	13	34.2
R6	43	18	41.8	25	58.2
R7	32	25	78.2	7	21.8
R8	29	18	62.1	11	37.9
R9	55	25	45.4	30	54.6
R10	31	25	80.7	6	19.3

Respondents	Total required	No. No. correctly	used %	No. misused or omitted	%
R11	26	15	57.7	11	42.3
R12	20	10	50.0	10	50.0
R13	35	20	57.2	15	42.8
R14	48	37	77.1	11	22.9
R15	26	10	38.4	16	61.6
R16	37	17	45.9	20	54.1
Total	566	367	64.8	199	35.2

The table shows that a significant 35.2% of the total instances of concord required have been realised wrongly. The concord problems encountered are subject-verb agreement and pronoun antecedent issues. Interestingly, the subject-verb agreement problems are the basic singular noun for singular verb distinctions. What is evident, however, is that more subject-verb agreement problems are encountered by the majority of respondents when the noun/subject is a concept, program (usually, a third person non-human referent), for instance, the Academic Writing course, Facebook, cats and dogs, as encountered in the essays. Some examples from the data are recounted here.

“The Academic Writing course have good effects on my Academic reading and writing.”

“To conclude, facebook help students to know more about internet...”

“...instead of them searching for the things he/she don’t understand he/she rather...”

“Cat and dogs has different characteristic and attitude and both of them can be seen...”

(Extracts from study data, 2015)

Another instance has to do with verbs that occur in complex structures which usually have the relative pronoun ‘which’ as subject. This confirms an earlier conclusion in this study that complexity is a source of most errors encountered in sentences produced by most social media savvy patrons. This is because social media discourse uses more of simple, truncated sentences; thus, the more structurally complex sentences introduced in Academic Writing, the more likely the sentences will be characterised by agreement and

other errors. The third commonly occurring subject-verb agreement problem involves a subject with compound verbs. The second part of the compound verb usually does not agree with the subject, and in some instances the tense of the preceding verb. Some examples of this agreement problems are illustrated below:

“As a result of this, am able to read and understood...”

“Some friends post music tracks which attracts students...”

“In this step the reader puts the book aside and try to recall the things he or she had studied.”

‘Secondly (sic) Facebook on the internet create a room for very wrong chat

What is worthy of note is that, unlike the other grammatical error types discussed, these agreement problems can not solely be accounted for by social media use or over use. The issue may have a more remote and fundamental source – more of quality basic education received and level of exposure to the language. However, a fact that cannot be ruled out is that the nature of social media communication has an intricate means of fossilizing the already appalling situation.

6.1.3.3 Punctuation

The discussion in this section covers all instances of required punctuation marks in the academic essays that served as data for the study. No predetermined punctuation marks were used as standard of measurement, but the analysis was based on the number as well as kind of punctuation marks required and those provided or otherwise by the data. Some punctuation marks were totally missing in the data. It is either they were not relevant to the contexts or respondents had alternatives for them.

For instance, there were no instances of the use of the dash and colon, while there was only one instance of the exclamation mark. Perhaps this also can be linked to the nature of the topic. The common punctuation marks evident in the data are comma, semi-colon, apostrophe, hyphen, question and period marks. Table 9 presents the data on punctuation marks.

Table 9: Grammatical Indicator: Punctuation

Respondents	Total No. of punctuation marks required	No. of punctuation used correctly	%	No. misused or omitted	%
R1	34	26	76.5	8	23.5
R2	40	24	60.0	16	40.0
R3	27	15	55.6	12	44.4
R4	34	30	88.3	4	11.7
R5	49	31	63.3	18	36.7
R6	36	14	38.8	22	61.2
R7	38	31	81.6	7	18.4
R8	55	36	65.5	19	34.5
R9	57	38	66.7	19	33.3
R10	39	27	69.3	12	30.7
R11	26	19	73.1	7	26.9
R12	35	19	54.3	16	45.7
R13	37	27	73.0	10	27.0
R14	60	38	63.4	22	36.6
R15	21	14	66.7	7	33.3
R16	72	52	72.3	20	27.7
Total	660	441	66.8	219	33.2

Table 9 shows the number of punctuation marks required in each script and the total number required in all sixteen essays. In addition, the table presents the number and percentages of those punctuation marks that were either realised appropriately or inappropriately. It further indicates that a total of 33.2% of cases involving punctuation either had the wrong punctuation substituted or none at all. This finding confirms prior conclusions that as a result of heavy social media engagements, students tend to omit or misuse relevant punctuation marks (Lyddy et.al, 2014; Drouin & Davis, 2009; Crystal 2008; Carrington, 2004). Also in a study of some undergraduate students in Coventry University (UK), Wood, Kemp, Waldron, and Hart (2014) found that punctuation and capitalisation were seen to disrupt students' representation of grammatical rule. Thus, for "undergraduates, there is some evidence [in existing literature] of a link between the tendency to make punctuation and capitalisation errors when texting and understanding

of written grammar” (p. 20). Similarly, Herring and Androutsopoulos (2015) reported that it is a normal phenomenon for social media and other computer mediated discourse to lack final sentence punctuation. This finding is also confirmed by the data as there were several sentences which lack the appropriate end marks.

The common punctuation errors identified in the current data include omission or wrong use of the comma, omission of the possessive marker, inappropriate use of the semi-colon, wrong use of end marks, notably the full stop. Among these punctuation errors identified, the comma and possessive marker seemed to be the most abused forms.

As far as the use of comma is concerned, three domains of usage were observed. The first is no placement of comma after introductory phrases or clauses. For example:

“Secondly Facebook on the internet creates a room for very long chat...”

“To some extent student (sic) feel to be with some people and therefore take much time to add new friends to socialize and feel happy.”

“At this stage the reader reads through the book...”

The second is the absence of comma to separate a dependent clause from an independent clause in relevant contexts. Some examples are provided below:

“Also some students may be intelligent and can help raise the flag of the university high but since they come from poor homes they will not get the opportunity to be admitted into the university.”

And the third instance is absence of comma or commas to separate sentence adverbials and non-restrictive clauses from the remaining elements in the sentence. For instance:

“...they spend long hours on facebook talking to their friends or chatting which can be done at break time in school.”

“

There were, however, other uses which were usually misapplication of commas that resulted into comma splices (see 6.1.3.1 for discussion on this) and inappropriate breaking of sentences.

The second most occurring punctuation mark is the apostrophe. This doubles as a grammatical feature and a phonological problem. Phonetically, undefined boundaries between certain words like “ones” and “one’s” and even “once” account for the lack of distinction between the grammatical roles of the words. Some examples on this feature have been provided below.

‘Plagiarism is the act of including in ones work the work of another knowingly or unknowingly...’

‘Plagiarism refers to using ones ideas without acknowledging the author’

“Give credit to the authors creative idea”

6.1.3.4 Spelling and Capitalisation

This section covers morphological and syntactic restrictions placed on certain words. It does not discuss misspelt words that are conditioned by phonology. Some examples are the use of the homophones “no” and “know”, “here” and “hear”. But rather, it discusses the orthographic forms of the words which require the formation of words with the appropriate alphabets in their appropriate order. It may take the form of appropriation or misappropriation of the plural formation of nouns, third person singular formation of verbs, or of capital and small letters. Once again, in the analysis, the study meticulously identified all instances where spelling and capitalisation were required and took a special interest in the application of the rules. These findings are presented in Table 10.

Table 10: Grammatical Indicator: Spelling and Capitalisation

Respondents	Total No. required	No. used correctly	%	No. misused or omitted	%
R1	39	20	51.3	19	48.7
R2	25	3	12.0	22	88.0
R3	9	2	22.2	7	77.8

Respondents	Total No. required	No. used correctly	%	No. misused or omitted	%
R4	21	20	95.2	1	4.8
R5	16	0	0.0	16	100.0
R6	21	2	9.5	19	90.5
R7	9	5	55.6	6	44.4
R8	28	12	42.8	16	57.2
R9	22	6	27.2	16	72.8
R10	13	0	0.0	13	100
R11	10	4	40.0	6	60.0
R12	7	6	85.8	1	14.2
R13	11	2	18.2	9	81.8
R14	18	4	22.2	14	77.8
R15	16	2	12.5	14	87.5
R16	32	8	25.0	24	75.0
Total	297	96	32.3	201	67.7

Table 10 takes a dramatic turn where the respondents have recorded more errors than the appropriate forms. This can be seen as a total of 201 representing 67.7% spelling and capitalisation errors were identified out of a total of 297 instances of the required case. The table also shows that only 96 (32.3%) instances of the required spelling and capitalisation were realised appropriately. Also, some respondents had all instances of required spelling and capitalisation wrong. Apart from respondents 4 and 12 who each had only one spelling and capitalisation error, all other respondents had more than five spelling and capitalisation errors.

One of the problems identified is the tendency of not capitalising some groups of proper nouns. Such proper nouns, usually, are names of academic programmes and institutions, organisations, languages, places and concepts. Generally, names of people and the first word in a sentence seem to be accorded their rightful spelling conventions. For instance, in the sample below, all instances of proper nouns were written in lower case or small letters.

“The academic writing course has changed my study habits (sic).”

“Students have abused the use of facebook and have made that social network take all their time.”

“Some of these online shoppings (sic) such as amazon offer customers very affordable prices...”

“I mostly use (sic) my sports updates. Pages like bbc sports, Super Sports, Marca, bbc news, etc post or update us with daily news around the world.”

Another area where respondents had problem with spelling and capitalisation was with single words with seemingly two morphological parts. Most respondents presented such words as separate forms. For example, “however” is represented as “how ever”, while words which have two separate morphological units are represented as one. An example is “donot” for “do not” and “does not” as “doesnot”.

There seems to be a lot of studies that have underscored the effects of social media spelling variants on standard spelling. Most of these findings have been confirmed by the current study. For instance, Paterson (2017) reporting on a paper published by the English Spelling Society indicated that the general attitude of most texters on social media is that typographical errors are normal or should be regarded as normal occurrences in a medium which requires speed over accuracy. Similarly, 22% of the study participants who fall between 18 and 24 years reported that they had less confidence when writing a formal essay without using their dictionaries (Paterson, 2017).

Obviously, because of the urgency associated with social media interaction, coupled with the fact that a combination of two or more characters on the key board have to be engaged to produce capital letters especially, users will avoid using the feature. Another reason respondents advanced is that using capitalisation or not does not affect the semantic content of their text messages. Thus, study respondents reported that they avoided using it because they felt lazy, found it cumbersome and deemed it unnecessary.

Dixon and Kaminska (2007) have observed that by exposing themselves to misspelt forms, young adults’ spelling performance is most likely to be interrupted. Also, frequent

as well as greater text messaging was linked to poorer performance in formal writing and spelling (De Jonge & Kemp, 2012; Rosen, Chang, Erwin, Carrier, & Cheever, 2010).

6.1.3.4 Lexical Competence

This section looks at the distinction between academic vocabulary and non-academic vocabulary as portrayed in the essays. Although the classification of academic vocabulary may comprise general, technical specialised and technical non-specialised words (Scarcella, 2003), the analysis of lexical competence in this study is based on only general academic words. This class of words falls under non-disciplinary specific words used in the academic domain.

Considering the generality of the Academic Writing and the Language and Study Skills courses and the respondents' level in the university (see section 4.5) assessing the use of technical or discipline specific words will not be appropriate. Instead, words which usage spans across varied content areas (Townsend, 2009; Hiebet & Lubliner, 2008) and which are frequently occurring in varied academic texts (Coxhead, 2000) are deemed appropriate. These are vocabulary used in the broader academic domain as a mark of shared academic literacy. In contrast, the range of non-academic vocabulary considered here includes contracted word forms, colloquial words or expressions, abbreviated and clipped forms, run-on expressions, as well as inappropriate misplaced words. Table 11 below contextualises this discussion.

Table 11: Lexical Indicator

Respondents	Total No. of Words	No. used Appropriately	%	No. used Inappropriately	%
R1	312	297	95.1	15	4.80
R2	440	414	94.0	26	5.90
R3	303	277	91.4	26	8.58
R4	535	530	99.0	5	0.93
R5	455	441	96.9	14	3.07
R6	271	235	86.7	36	13.2
R7	401	394	98.2	7	1.74

Respondents	Total No. of Words	No. used Appropriately	%	No. used Inappropriately	%
R8	267	250	93.6	17	6.36
R9	201	183	91.0	18	8.95
R10	287	278	96.8	9	3.13
R11	337	326	96.7	11	3.26
R12	317	308	97.1	9	2.83
R13	319	316	99.0	3	0.94
R14	461	456	98.9	5	1.08
R15	197	184	93.4	13	6.59
R16	266	248	93.2	18	6.76
Total	5369	5137	95.6	232	4.4

As shown in Table 11, out of a total of 5369 words and expressions, only 232, representing 4.4% fall under non-academic vocabulary. A large proportion of 95.6% are either considered academic or fall within formal usage. The non-academic words identified in the data were regrouped into five. These are inappropriate/misplaced words, contracted forms, colloquial words/expressions, abbreviated and clipped forms, and run-on expressions.

The vocabulary items considered as inappropriate or misplaced cover a range of cases where both words may be present in the language but the context calls for just one of them (these are usually homophones) or instances where the respondents used a word belonging to the wrong word class. Common examples in the data include “*theft*” instead of “*thief*”, “*been*” in place of “*being*”, “*there*” for “*their*”, as well as “*am*” for “*I am*”.

The contracted forms are instances where one of two lexical forms which are adjacent is phonological reduced (usually the second) and attached to the first form. Contraction of words is usually a feature of informality. “Contractions occur in formal writing mainly as representations of speech.” (Dictionary.com). Some examples in the data are *don’t*, *I’ll*, *they’re*, *we’ve*, and *shouldn’t*.

Also evident were colloquial words or expressions. These are words and expressions used in everyday casual context and they mostly sound conversational. In addition, they are unable to provide the ‘exactness’ needed in academic communication (Fowler & Aaron, 1992). These may come in the form of clichés, some old fashioned idiomatic and figurative usages (Pollock, 2000), slangs, redundancy and a host of other informal expressions. Some examples include

“When the fees are increased, the student been (sic) the constituent of the university will be cash trapped.”

“Previously, I use (sic) to do the Senior Secondary School type of learning where I try to learn for examination purposes by chewing and pouring.”

“Students spend most of their time on facebook now adays.”

“The internet is there for students to access when they find problem in understanding something.”

“Facebook has been a standing (sic) block for students to value the use of internet in their academic work”

Another form of colloquial vocabulary found in the data were abbreviated and clipped forms. Some specific examples are “GES” (Ghana Education Service) “bbc” (British Broadcasting Corporation), exams (examination).

There were also two instances of run-on expressions. They are expressions that are used at the end of series of items mentioned or a list to suggest that there are more instances of the items mentioned. The two examples encountered in the data are “etc” (etcetera), as well as, “and so on.”

Among the non-academic vocabulary items found in the data, colloquial words and expressions were dominant. This is shown in Figure 7 below.

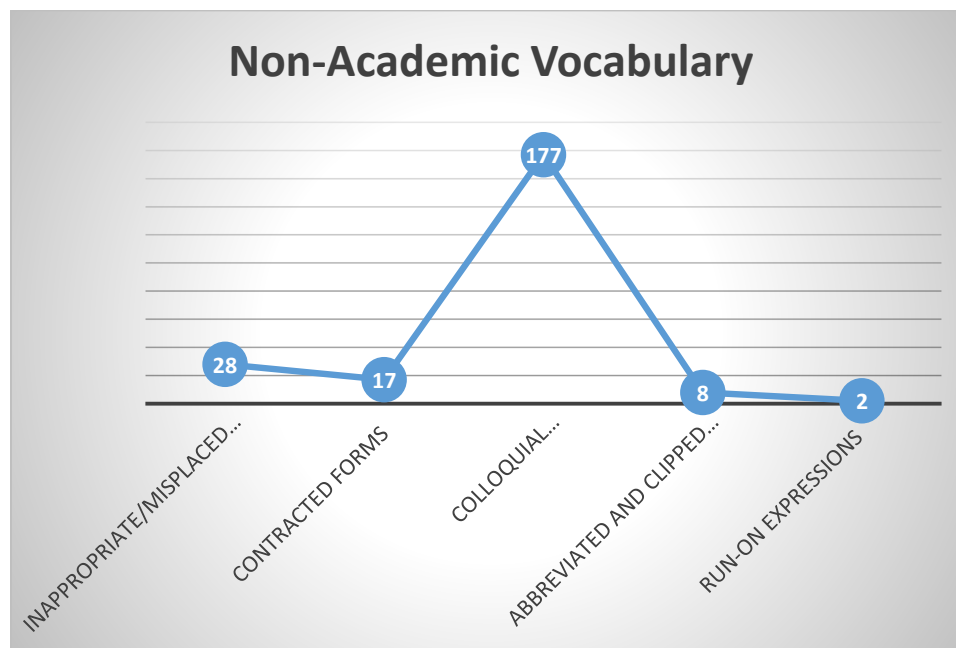


Figure 7: Frequency distribution of non-academic vocabulary

From Figure 7, it can be seen that run-on expressions constitute the least non-academic vocabulary items in the data. This is followed by abbreviated and clipped forms and contracted forms. Inappropriate or misplaced vocabulary is the second highest while colloquial vocabulary constitutes the highest. This largely confirms prior conclusions on the transferability of the casual, speech-like nature of social media into academic discourse. Studies suggest that the acquisition of new and sometimes fossilised vocabulary is enhanced by the frequent use and exposure to both the “form” and “context” of usage (Monica-Ariana & Anamaria-Mirabela, 2014; Schmidt, 2001; Nation, 1990).

6.1.3.5 Discourse Competence

This section constitutes the higher order or macro level analysis of the academic essays. The analysis goes beyond the sentence level (although it may be included) of analysing academic essays. To account for the discourse structure, the essays were broken down into manageable chunks: first into paragraphs and then into sentences. The paragraphs

were then classified as introduction, body, and conclusion. Generally, the symbol ✓ typifies the presence of a particular feature, for example thesis statement in an introductory paragraph, while the symbol ✗ represents absence of the feature. In the case of the body paragraphs, two discourse features were considered: a well-developed paragraph with the topic sentence and supporting sentences. The under listed symbols with their accompanying descriptions were used to indicate the composition of the body paragraphs.

- ✓ Topic sentences present and well developed
- ✗ No topic sentences
- ? Topic sentences present but not well developed

The Table (12) below presents findings on the discourse competence of the level of academic literacy acquired by respondents and how social media may mediate this process.

Table 12: Discourse Indicators

Respondents	Total No. of Paragraphs	Introductory Paragraph Background	Paragraph Thesis statement	Body Paragraphs (Topic Sentence + Supporting Sentences)	Conclusion
R1	5	✓	✓	✓	✗
R2	5	✓	✗	✓	✓
R3	6	✗	✗	✗	✗
R4	5	✓	✓	✓	✓
R5	7	✗	✗	?	✗
R6	7	✗	✗	?	✗
R7	5	✓	✓	✓	✓
R8	4	✓	✓	?	✗
R9	4	✗	✗	?	✗
R10	3	✗	✗	?	✗
R11	5	✓	✗	✓	✓
R12	3	✓	✗	?	✗
R13	5	✗	✗	?	✗
R14	6	✓	✓	✓	✓

Respondents	Total No. of Paragraphs	Introductory Paragraph Background	Paragraph Thesis statement	Body Paragraphs (Topic Sentence + Supporting Sentences)	Conclusion
R15	3	x	x	?	x
R16	4	✓	✓	?	x
Total	77	9	6	6	5

As indicated in Table 12, a total of 77 paragraphs were realised in all 16 academic essays. Out of this number, only 9 had a well laid out background to the essay and only 6 had a clear thesis statement. This suggests that the rest of the essays did not have a clear focus. In addition, with regard to the constitution of the body paragraphs, only 6 essays had well-constructed body paragraphs with explicit topic sentences and at least major and minor supporting sentences. Also, only 5 essays had conclusions. In all, only 3 essays had the full complement of the discourse structure of the academic essay.

One observation made is that most of the essayists in the study spent considerable time developing the content or the message at the expense of the structure. This often resulted in incoherent, disunified and incomplete essays since oftentimes the writers' train of thought was lost in the discussion. There were also instances of an essay with three body paragraphs having one or two of its paragraphs well developed and the remaining with either no clear topic sentence or a topic sentence with inadequate supporting details. There were also instances of an entire paragraph being a repetition of a previous paragraph, while some had more than one idea being expressed.

Considering what possible influence social media could have on this, it must be noted that social media language has its defined structure different from the discourse structure of academic writings. Also, social media discourse structure is defined by simplicity, spontaneity, and cordiality, a somehow direct opposite of the structure of the academic essay. In addition, social media discourse is content-based. Preference is given more to the message communicated than 'how' to convey it. As a result most of the respondents'

essays laid more emphasis on carrying the message across than on how the message is to be constructed. This often results in incomplete, incoherent and disjointed messages. Furthermore, writing on most social media platforms follows a two-level structure: post and comments, 'which allows for simple argumentation and may not be sufficient for "full-scale" argumentation' (Lange, Bojars, Groza, Breslin, & Hand-schuh, 2008, p. 4). Even though social media discourse like WhatsApp has a rich conversational structure unified by a topic and a rheme, the structure is usually 'incoherent' and fragmented. There is also a high level of periodic interference with the conversational structure of an ongoing discussion, as evident in this excerpt of social media data derived from this study:

10/7/2015 9:20:09 AM: Dtrmnd2rchmagoals□□□□□→□: Hello everybody

10/7/2015 9:20:41 AM: +233 24 917 9439: Hi

10/7/2015 9:22:32 AM: Dtrmnd2rchmagoals□□□□□→□: I called the lecturer and asked of how the groupings should be done

10/7/2015 9:23:18 AM: +233 24 917 9439: Yh

10/7/2015 9:25:18 AM: Dtrmnd2rchmagoals□□□□□→□: ND she said it LL be dun in class so terminate d ones I sent ok?

10/7/2015 9:26:20 AM: +233 26 744 6719: Amen

10/7/2015 9:27:03 AM: +233 24 917 9439: Kk

10/7/2015 9:38:15 AM: +233 24 279 8239: What about the assignment

10/7/2015 9:38:58 AM: Dtrmnd2rchmagoals□□□□□→□: Mmm..i guess we Av to it by ourselves

10/7/2015 9:39:30 AM: +233 24 279 8239: K

10/7/2015 9:40:53 AM: Dtrmnd2rchmagoals□□□□□→□: Do u Av d questions with u?

10/7/2015 9:49:30 AM: +233 24 279 8239: Is at home

10/7/2015 9:49:48 AM: +233 24 279 8239: I'm not at home

10/7/2015 9:50:12 AM: Dtrmnd2rchmagoals□□□□□→□: Okk..den u send it to me wen u get home

10/7/2015 10:17:21 AM: +233 24 279 8239: Kk

10/7/2015 10:27:10 AM: +233 24 300 2294: And what did she said

10/7/2015 12:17:49 PM: +233 26 454 4256: **Pls we r starting right now**

10/7/2015 12:18:16 PM: +233 54 981 3197: Startin wah

10/7/2015 12:18:30 PM: +233 26 454 4256: The French

10/7/2015 12:18:47 PM: +233 54 981 3197: At where??

10/7/2015 12:18:59 PM: +233 26 454 4256: NLC

10/7/2015 12:19:07 PM: +233 26 454 4256: Right wing

10/7/2015 12:19:13 PM: +233 54 981 3197: Ooohkk

10/7/2015 1:45:30 PM: +233 54 863 5396: Pls which tim does de tutorials ends.for today

10/7/2015 2:39:38 PM: +233 57 550 2009: How many of u hr r in da 4-5 grp

10/7/2015 2:39:48 PM: +233 57 550 2009: Wanna Noe da lctr hall

10/7/2015 3:25:46 PM: Dtrmnd2rchmagoals□□□□□→□: Jx closed

10/7/2015 4:05:30 PM: +233 57 550 2009: 4-5 ooo

10/7/2015 4:05:43 PM: +233 54 765 5508: Pls e do aa give me the Aw assignment wai ...@class rep

10/7/2015 4:05:44 PM: +233 57 550 2009: Or its 2geda

10/7/2015 4:07:41 PM: Dtrmnd2rchmagoals□□□□□→□: @Red LL collect it from a frnd n send it to u..@perianda dey r abt startn d 4-5 tut.

10/7/2015 4:07:58 PM: Dtrmnd2rchmagoals□□□□□→□: So hurry n come

As can be observed with the highlighted comment, the contributor's post did not correspond to the ongoing discussion, resulting in a momentary shift in focus involving all the participants until such a time when another contributor revisits the earlier topic.

In summary, social media related errors in academic writing, as presented by this study, do not only occur at the micro level of writing but do also result in a breakdown of the discourse structure of the academic essay. Considering the inevitability of social media interaction in our dispensation, the technology should however be retooled to aid in the teaching and learning of academic literacy. The next section discusses some suggestions on the use of social media in developing academic literacy skills.

6.2 Integrating social media (WhatsApp) into Academic Writing

Just as it is the case in other parts of the world, the average Ghanaian university student belongs to the net-generation of students. This class of students have a new and a more sophisticated means of communicating and expressing their thoughts. In the same way, they have re-defined writing to suit the affordances of their era, which is largely digital. As a result, if new literacies, of which social media forms an integral part, are integrated into academic writing programmes, teachers will be able to bridge the gap and will be in a better position to leverage on the new forms of writing and communication in order to make writing a meaningful and engaging activity for the technologically savvy students (Sweeny, 2010). As stated by Conole (2010), “[i]n an information-rich, Web 2.0 world where the focus is on user-generated content, peer dialogue, and co-construction of knowledge, the notion of teacher as ‘expert’ and student as ‘receiver’ makes little sense” (p. 402).

As discussed in section 5.3.8, findings from this study have also confirmed the views of most scholars that a number of students are experimenting with social media communication tools and employing them for academic purposes (O’Brien & Scharber, 2008; Bezemer & Kress, 2008; Sweeny, 2010). What is key, therefore, is the ability and willingness to translate the positives to effective academic use. A study respondent had this to say:

“Once you have a question and you post on our group page, colleagues are ready to help if they can.....this normally happens during exams when we just discuss past questions through groups chat.....colleagues who can solve the questions, solve them and post pictures of the solution on the page” (Study respondent)

Research has shown, and as confirmed by the findings of this study, that students use technology, for that matter social media for two broad purposes: one, to establish social harmony or ties with friends, family and loved ones through texting, instant messages,

audio-visuals, etc and two, to gain information from trusted sources and or individuals (Ito et al., 2008). The second point goes to support one of the central components of what constitutes academic literacy, which is the acquisition of digital literacy (Hegarty, Penman, Kelly, Jeffrey, Coburn & McDonald, 2010).

6.2.1 Guideline on using social media to promote academic literacy skills.

This should follow a three-staged plan.

Briefing stage

- Teacher informs students of the need to use social media to support teaching and learning, especially in the digital age of learning.
- Teacher brainstorms with students on the adoption of a suitable social media platform (for point one).
- Teacher and students adopt a particular social media platform and create account (for the purpose of point one).
- Teacher, in consultation with, students proposes guidelines on rules of participation on the platform.

Integration stage

- This is the actual stage. It is an almost never ending cycle until the skill is acquired.
- The key tools needed here are scaffolding, mediation, and feedback. Teacher identifies learners' Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and provides the necessary scaffolding and feedback.

Evaluation stage (pre and post evaluation)

- With the pre-evaluation, teacher frequently assesses the object of study and introduces more scaffolding where necessary.
- Post-evaluation (should be done usually at the end of the duration of the course: semester, academic year). Teacher and students perform a total assessment of especially stage two and teacher notes the recommendations done for future implementation.

6.2.2 Suggestions on the proposed guideline

To start with, the teacher, with the help of the students, needs to identify a suitable social media platform, like the WhatsApp application, and ensure that all learners are comfortable with the chosen media.

In order to ensure that every student approaches the tasks with all seriousness, the teacher should pre-inform the students and be determined to award marks for active participation. Also, it is the teacher's responsibility to ensure that only standard language is used on the platform set aside for the class discussion. Studies have shown that it is immediately difficult for students to abide by formal language rules on social media since they still regard such platforms as informal; besides, it places limitation on their communication prowess but as time goes by they become accustomed to it and begin to police one another (West, 2008; Young, 2008).

Since spelling and word choice are central to the goal of writing, students' chats can serve as teaching and learning resources to teach spelling of words, sentence structure and word order, in a form of contrastive analysis. Conducting such virtual contrastive analysis (as I prefer to call it) exposes the students to distinctive features of the two genres – social media discourse and academic discourse – and compels them to be guided by the data generated by themselves. This can be supported by internet workshop lessons. Internet workshop is a process ' which involves the selection of a website related to a teacher-defined task or a search for specific content, development of an activity for students to complete with information from the site, and sharing of the information.' (Sweeny, 2010). When students are aware that they are all involved in the same writing activity, it lessens the burden and takes more stress off the teacher since students now have a wider range of mediation – technology and peers – and reduces writer's block. In addition, actively engaging students in social media mediated learning, 'allows users to collaborate and broaden their experience and lets students take responsibility for finding answers to their own learning needs' (Choi & Ho, 2002).

In addition, summary lessons can also be taught using this approach. A teacher can give a passage to his/her students and will ask each of the students, over the weekend, to summarise the text using the medium of texting. Students should be encouraged to

restate the original idea in a brief and concise manner. Given the limited space afforded by social media texting, the students will be able to master the skills of brevity and precision. The teacher then serves as an e-moderator (Salmon, 2000) scaffolding learners to use the social media tool for academic purposes until the student is able to master the needed skills.

Students can equally be tasked to explore the internet, identify useful writing sites and send the links to the social media platform for the group's discussion. The ability of a student or a group of students to recommend a particular online resource for other members of the group in itself is an indication of the students' acquisition of the academic literacy skill of evaluation of information (Weideiman, 2009).

Bearing in mind that the traditional notion of the teacher holding all of the knowledge, and the learner receiving that knowledge from the teacher in a predetermined order, is undergoing a fierce challenge and resistance by the complexity of 21st century realities (Siemens, 2008; Yelland, 2011), the language teacher can, therefore, leverage on the affordances of social media and the internet to digress from the traditional five-paragraphed essay assignment by encouraging students to blend multimodal text into a unique presentation of their ideas and thoughts. Multimodal texts include video, audio, images, and hyperlinks. For instance, for an essay assignment of a narrative, expository or persuasive essay instead of the teacher instructing the students to produce only a written text, students could be encouraged to include hyperlinks into the text as a way of testing their synthesis and analytical skills.

On the other hand, students could be made to compose their essays supported by audio-visuals and present to or share among their colleagues for critiquing or discussion. It is believed that this kind of written assignments make the students creative, dynamic and analytical (Holder, 2006). Evidently, this form of instruction is also supported by the socio-cultural theory of Vygotsky (1978), which is one of the theories guiding this study. Thus, in the Academic literacy class, learning should be seen in an enabling context with an

expert (preferably the teacher) who guides and plays more of a facilitating role, and intermittently scaffolding when necessary.

In teaching plagiarism and referencing, the teacher turned e-moderator can ask students to reference one another's posts. In the same way, chain messages can be used to teach sources of plagiarism and ways of avoiding it. Chain messages are usually text messages passed on from one user to the other in a cyclical manner. Normally, the composer of a chain message is unknown which makes it less authentic. Fraudulent people, who have one motive or the other, also engage in composing chain messages. Usually to make the message appear authentic, the unknown composer of the message ascribes it to an influential figure in the society who often comes to disassociate him/herself from the content of the message.

In conclusion, the current breed of university students are net-gen learners and they are 'accustomed to instantly accessing information, which is usually readable and unchallenging'; theirs is a world driven by the 'anywhere, anytime motif' (Basset, 2012). Teachers in the Academic literacy programme should therefore retool their methods of teaching to meet the net-generation expectations of learning, while at the same time imparting the needed knowledge.

6.3 Chapter summary

This chapter was in response to research questions three and four. It first presented, analysed and discussed the third set of data – students' academic writing scripts - for the study. It was found out that the students committed both lower and higher order academic errors. Social media interactions were seen to influence in varied degrees most of the language errors committed by students. The second part of the chapter proposed guidelines on the effective integration of social media technology in the teaching and learning process, towards the acquisition of effective academic literacy skills. The next chapter summarises, concludes and offers recommendations for future studies.

CHAPTER SEVEN

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.0 Introduction

The birth of social media and its unique language choices has caused a seemingly uproar in the media landscape, educational sector and even in the home among parents. Suddenly it has created a new awakening, amidst mixed feelings of fear and optimism as the impact the affordances of the new media and its accompanying linguistic features has on students' academic performance and communication was unknown. While there exist some research findings from some parts of the world, especially from the western world, either confirming or allaying the fears of the techno-panics, little is known about the propensity or otherwise of the phenomenon on the Ghanaian university student's academic life. Consequently, this study was undertaken to investigate the emergence of social media discourse among Ghanaian university students and its impact on their acquisition of academic literacy. The study was aimed at finding answers to the following research questions:

- 1 What is the nature of Ghanaian university students' linguistic practices on social media?
- 2 What unique experiences have Ghanaian university students gained through their interaction on social media?
- 3 To what extent does language use in social media by Ghanaian university students affect their acquisition of academic literacy skills?
- 4 How can social media be used as an assistive pedagogical tool in advancing Ghanaian university students' acquisition of academic literacy?

The study was largely qualitative. It however adopted a 'netnographic' approach (which is a virtual counterpart of the traditional offline ethnography). Using a purposive sampling technique a sample size of one hundred and eighty eight (188) first year undergraduate students from two Ghanaian universities were recruited for the study. The data for the study came from three sources: research participants' interactions on social media, semi-

structured interview, and sampled academic writing scripts of research participants. Participant observation was the main investigative tool with support from questionnaires, field notes and key-informant interviews. The data was analysed using the qualitative analysis software, Nvivo.

This chapter presents summary of the major findings of the study, draws conclusions, offers recommendations and suggests direction for future study.

7.1 Summary of findings

In this section, major findings from each research question are recounted.

1. What is the nature of Ghanaian university students' linguistic practices on social media?

In understanding the nature of Ghanaian university students' social media linguistic practices, it was found out that Ghanaian university students' social media interactions, to a greater extent, falls within the broader scope of social media language described in the literature, thus confirming prior studies on this topic (Crystal, 2006; Carrington, 2004; Thurlow, Lengel & Tomic, 2004; Petrie, 1999). Nevertheless, this is not devoid of a touch of the unique colouration of Ghanaianisms.

These instances of Ghanaianisms were collectively termed “Ghinglish” (an abridged form of Ghanaian English, to mimic social media text messaging language). “Ghinglish” manifests in the data when research participants used certain particles in the data in response to a post or to add some level of emphasis to the message. This is not analysed here as code switching or mixing (For example, ‘yoo’ meaning “okay”; ‘wai’ for “alright or okay”; ‘aii’ also for ‘okay’, I can’t think far - to signal confusion).

In all, Ghanaian university students' language use on social media covered four broad linguistic areas: Syntax, lexis, spelling and mechanics (see 5.2).

2. What unique experiences have Ghanaian university students gained through their interaction on social media?

In response to question 2, data from the semi-structured interviews conducted with the key informants were analysed. Eight themes representing eight key findings have emerged from the analysis. They are summarised here accordingly.

Motivation for being on social media

It was found that research participants' prime motivation for being on social media was to satisfy their need to connect with family, friends and loved ones, both home and abroad. Social media was found as a cheaper, faster and convenient way of achieving this aim.

In addition, participants use social media for entertainment, current information, avoidance of boredom and lastly for research purposes. This finding disproves an earlier conclusion drawn by Bridgestock (2013) that students get engaged on social media largely to keep up to date with current issues; it however confirms Lenhart's (2015) finding that communication is the number one driving force of students' social media engagement.

Motivation for using social media language

Two findings were identified under this theme. The first is the desire to gain acceptance in a virtual group. Respondents indicated that in order to identify with their social media friends they needed to conform to the writing style of members of the group. Standard English is seen as playing a secondary role in this domain because it is deemed as unnatural, not likely to be understood by friends and a waste of time. Anyone who attempts to use formal English suffers the scorn of other members of the group. These respondents have, however, stated that when they are interacting with outsiders or other age groups they become circumspect. This confirms Herring's (2007) finding that

students have different registers which they use to interact with different people on social media. This also goes to confirm Del Hyme's (1974) view on ethnography of communication that the topic, people and setting influence linguistic choices.

The second finding is that there is another group of social media users who feel motivated to acquire the linguistic conventions but do this through a combination of learning by observation and immersion, a natural tendency. From these two findings, it is clear that both groups of social media users identified in the data are leveraging on their peers and other users of the technology as mediators to acquire the needed social media linguistic conventions.

The preference for predictive texting and social media language

The respondents reported that they prefer social media text messaging language to predictive texting. Their reason was that predictive texting wastes time, produces formal language and often suggests the wrong word.

Average number of hours spent on social media communication

Averagely, study respondents reported spending four (4) hours on social media daily and three (3) hours on academic work (this may sometimes include lecture times). An average of 50 personal messages are exchanged daily, which partly confirms Lenhart's (2015) finding that young adults exchange about 30 messages daily. This excludes messages from chat groups, which number between 5 and 20 with an average of 500 messages daily.

These findings accurately confirm previous conclusions that students spend more time on social media than on academic engagements (Anjugu, 2013; Mehmood & Taswir, 2013; Paul, Baker & Cochran, 2012; Banquil & Chua, 2009), and also that students are aware of the consequences of over engaging in social media but their level of addiction makes it almost impossible for them to disengage from it (Adabzadeh, 2013).

Also, it has been found that, on the average, the number of hours spent on social media platforms during holidays increases and it is almost two times the number of hours spent when students are in school. This suggests that the demands of academic work is a determining factor of students' social media engagements; thus, the more students are engaged academically the less time they allot to social media activities.

Engagement in multitasking

The key finding here is that social media interaction distracts academic engagements. Thus, students multitask to keep abreast with both activities simultaneously. This results in low attention span and inability to complete academic tasks in time. This finding contradicts earlier observations that students' multitasking on social media does not affect their academic engagements (Crystal, 2001).

Infiltration of Social Media language into academic writing

The main finding here is that prolonged use of social media language negatively impacts on the performance of academic language. Students explained that during formal writing periods, especially under examination pressure, they resort to using text message language. Often, those who are able to detect the errors correct them only when they have enough time to edit the work.

Another finding is that respondents take a longer time to remember the correct spelling of certain English words that they used to spell with ease prior to engaging in social media discourse. These two findings are in congruence with Godwin-Jones' (2008) observation that students who excessively rely on informal conversation on the internet have 'the potential to find means to link informal and recreational writing with academic writing' (p. 7). Similarly, the two findings here corroborate existing findings that frequent use of and exposure to certain conventions of usage lead to concretisation of the language feature (s) in the users' lexicon (Monica-Ariana & Anamaria-Mirabela, 2014; Schmidt, 2001; Nation, 1990).

Students' use of social media for academic purposes

Despite not engaging social media extensively for academic purposes, as compared to the other uses for it, study respondents indicated social media plays a major role in their learning process. First of all, participants do take snapshots of relevant pages of text books, lecture notes, timetables, and other important academic notices and share with course mates and other students via social media. Also, some students share URL links to relevant study websites with course mates. In addition, some students go to the extent of recording lecture series, especially on topics that are deemed difficult, on their smartphones for future reference or for sharing with colleagues who were absent at lectures. Further, students confirmed they sometimes hold virtual academic discussions on social media.

Thus, on a variety of social media platforms, students have a wide range of academic difficulties resolved through colleagues and other friends. These findings are not in isolation; they agree with previous findings that students have found very creative means of using social media to support their learning needs (Arnolds & Paulus, 2010; Chen, Lambert, & Guidry, 2010). Again, this confirms that with the help of peers and teachers, social media as a technology can be instrumental in mediating the learning process.

3. To what extent does language use in social media by Ghanaian university students affect their acquisition of academic literacy skills?

Findings from the data do affirm that language use on social media does influence negatively the acquisition of certain academic literacy skills. These findings are found in four areas of linguistic competence.

Phonological competence

On the phonological level, collectively, not much has been seen to suggest social media conventions affect or are beginning to affect the acquisition of academic literacy; however, there is a growing tendency that at the individual level this may be the case. Generally, the respondents demonstrated their ability to curtail the influx of their social media phonological choices on their academic communication. Even though, the number of phonologically conditioned spellings identified in the data may be regarded as insignificant, it does serve as an indication of possible occurrences of the feature in academic discourse.

Grammatical competence

The essays were characterised with numerous sentence fragments and run on sentences which suggest a more informal conversational tone involving truncated sentences (Crystal, 2008).

Another finding was that there was a general non-compliance to the conventions of punctuation, spelling and capitalisation. This is identified as a direct influence of respondents' heavy reliance on social media 'lingo' which is often reported to be associated with the omission or misuse of punctuation marks, deviant spellings and capitalisation as it requires (Lyddy, et. al, 2014; Drouin & Davis, 2009). This goes to confirm respondents own submissions in the semi-structured interview that they sometimes inadvertently transfer their social media language choices into serious academic writing. It also confirms the observation that the content of messages with respect to levels of texting slang used" (Wood, Kemp, Waldron, and Hart, 2014, p.5) becomes the specific area the individual is the most affected.

The study did not find a direct influence from social media language usage on respondents' subject-verb and pronoun antecedent agreement problems. It was concluded that problems associated with concord do have a remote and fundamental

underpinnings relating to quality elementary education received and level of exposure to the language. However, a fact that cannot be ruled out is that the nature of social media communication has an intricate means of fossilizing the already appalling situation.

Lexical Competence

With regard to vocabulary choices, the general finding was that there were more colloquial, as well as inappropriate words and expressions which did not appeal to the 'exactness' needed in academic communication (Fowler & Allen, 1992). Also evident were more contracted and clipped forms which suggest informal and conversational tone.

Discourse Competence

Three findings were observed under discourse competence.

The first is that there was a general breakdown in the structure of the essays, as the generic structure of academic essays – introduction, body and conclusion – was not followed to the letter.

Also, the tone of the essays was overly conversational. This may be traced to the overuse of colloquial expressions discussed above.

In addition, most of the essays lacked a clear focus as thesis statements were either absent or where included they were not well stated or not supported with relevant supporting evidence.

4. How can social media be used as an assistive pedagogical tool in advancing Ghanaian university students' acquisition of academic literacy?

The study found that social media can be used to support the teaching and learning of academic literacy skills. Accordingly, the study proposed a three-staged plan that aims at assisting the teacher in promoting the integration of social media into the teaching and learning of academic literacy. The steps include

- Briefing stage
- Integration stage (involves scaffolding, mediation, and feedback)
- Evaluation stage (involves pre and post evaluation of the whole process)

7.2 Limitations of the study

The study encountered two major challenges. Firstly, being a netnographic study, there were key technical challenges which were purely technologically related. This is because at the time of collecting the social media data for the study, Ghana was undergoing a serious energy crisis which resulted in days of power outage. This made it difficult for some respondents, while it delayed some, in contributing to the social media discussions as their phones run out of battery power and could not be immediately recharged. Nonetheless, this incidence has not skewed the results of the study as data was collected over a period of time to make it possible for the affected respondents to come back into the conversation.

Secondly, in order to cut down on cost and also to reflect the true sense of the traditional ethnographic approach online, the researcher's personal phone was used to collect the social media data. This resulted into tons of messages received daily from the social media groups used for the study. It also required that the researcher read every message and respond to those that needed her attention. This was sometimes overwhelming as it left little or no time to attend to other equally important engagements. That notwithstanding, it led to immeasurable and in-depth revelations into the respondents' social media linguistic practices.

7.3 Conclusion

This netnographic study of Ghanaian university students' linguistic choices on social media and its impact on the acquisition of their academic literacy shows that social media does impact negatively on the academic literacy of students. In specific terms, overdependence on social media discourse results in limited time span and low attention span. There is also enough evidence which point to the fact that due to the influence of social media interaction there is a general breakdown in both sentence and discourse structure of academic writing resulting in deviant spelling, omission and misuse of punctuation marks and capitalisation as well as a high level of colloquialism in academic writing.

At the same time, there is strong evidence to suggest that social media, when properly retooled, can effectively promote the acquisition of academic literacy.

It is not surprising that the subjects who were being affected negatively by their engagement with the new communicative order are simultaneously beginning to find positive academic use for it. Thus, what matters most is the dialogue on its use for academic purposes. This, however, must be done cautiously in order not to overstep the boundaries of serious academic discourse.

7.4 Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

Academic support units, like the Language Centre of the University of Ghana and the General Education Department of Valley View University, should restructure their course contents to incorporate digital literacy within the general academic literacy programmes they offer.

In addition, lecturers handling the Academic Writing programmes should be given in-service training to acquire new digital literacy skills to support their traditional classroom pedagogies.

Also, as a temporary measure, academic support staff who are technologically inclined should be engaged to assist, especially students, in ways of incorporating digital literacy skills in their writing assignments. Lecturers should be able to refer their students to such people for immediate assistance.

The Language Centre of the University of Ghana has a well-equipped language laboratory which is used almost purposely for teaching English as Foreign Language students. This laboratory and other available laboratories, could be made accessible to the Coordinator and lecturers of the Academic Writing unit for the demonstration and teaching of digital literacy skills.

Valley View University, even though does not have a language laboratory yet, has ICT laboratories dotted at various parts of the campus. In addition, the university administration has installed overhead projectors in almost all lecture theatres. Such resources can be properly retooled to serve additional purposes as the digital literacy component which promotes academic literacy.

Looking at the current average teaching load of a university staff, coupled with other academic related responsibilities, extending some of the activities that could have been done offline to online with students can be a daunting task for some lecturers. When coming out with policies on faculty teaching loads and hiring processes, School Administrators and Heads of Departments should factor this into their decisions and should be committed to seeing it materialise.

7.5 Recommendation for further research

The following recommendations are made to guide further studies in the area of social media discourse and academic literacy:

The study looked at the effects of social media discourse on the acquisition of academic literacy, it however, focused on only one social media platform. Future studies can be conducted to look at two or more platforms to be able to have a true measure of students' time spent on social media and how that affects time allotted to academic work for effective acquisition of academic literacy skills.

In addition, the study used first year students who were in their first semester of study, as research subjects. The aim is for early detection of the 'linguistic baggage' they may be carrying on from high school to the university in order to institute timely interventions. However, it can be argued that such students have not yet acquired enough academic literacy skills to exhibit the skills being investigated. Whereas this argument does not have enough ground to first of all determine when one is ready to exhibit the skills of a new discourse community, and second the acquisition of academic literacy skills is a process and not a one time off event, in future, it is worth considering for a similar study to look at third or final year university students' use of social media and its impact on their acquisition of academic literacy.

Also, a longitudinal study on the effects of the subjects social media use on their academic literacy to cover their four year duration in the university is worth considering. Similarly, future research may consider using one first year and one final year group of students to be able to determine if there is any difference in their acquisition of academic literacy, along the line.

Another research worth pursuing is the use of control groups. In this case the first group of respondents could be students who have never used social media and the other group could be social media users. Such a comparative study should give a true reflection of the impact of students' social media usage on their acquisition of academic literacy.

Finally, the study focused on undergraduate students. A similar study could target graduate students for a possible comparison of the phenomenon.

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Appendix A: Ethical Clearance Letter

RESEARCH AND INNOVATION
OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

NAME OF RESEARCHER/INVESTIGATOR:

Ms JSA Anku

Student No:

14014839

PROJECT TITLE: The emergence of social media discourse among Ghanaian University Students: Implications for the acquisition of academic literacy

PROJECT NO: SHSS/16/ENG/01/1904

SUPERVISORS/ CO-RESEARCHERS/ CO-INVESTIGATORS

NAME	INSTITUTION & DEPARTMENT	ROLE
Dr EK Klu	University of Venda	Supervisor
Dr LMP Mulaudzi	University of Venda	Co-Supervisor
Dr GSK Adika	University of Ghana	Co-Supervisor
Ms JSA Anku	University of Venda	Investigator - Student

ISSUED BY:

UNIVERSITY OF VENDA, RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

Date Considered: April 2016

Decision by Ethical Clearance Committee Granted

Signature of Chairperson of the Committee:

Name of the Chairperson of the Committee: Prof. G.E. Ekosse



University of Venda

PRIVATE BAG X5050, TSOHOYANDOU, 0950, LIMPOPO PROVINCE, SOUTH AFRICA
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"A quality driven financially sustainable, rural-based Comprehensive University"

Appendix B: Request Letter

P. O. Box AD 116
Adenta-Flat
Accra-Ghana

20th Jan., 2015.

The Dean,
Office of the Dean of Students,
University of Ghana,
Legon.

Dear Sir/Madam,

REQUEST FOR AUTHORISATION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE UNIVERSITY OF GHANA

My name is Joyce Senya Ama Anku, a doctoral student of the University of Venda, South Africa. I am conducting a research on the topic: “The Emergence of Social Media Discourse among Ghanaian University Students: Implications for the acquisition of Academic Literacy”.

This study is being conducted under the supervision of Prof. Ernest K. Klu and Dr. L.M.P. Mulaudzi of the University of Venda, South Africa, and Prof. GSK Adika of the University of Ghana, Language Centre.

My study is qualitative with a netnographic approach (a virtual form of ethnographic research); thus, it will require all participants to form part of a common social media platform of their choice. The study also requires me to sample participants’ class assignments and exercises to ascertain their demonstration of academic literacy skills. In addition, at the end of the period, some active members on the social media platform

created for the participants will be selected for key informant interviews, which will be tape-recorded (I shall inform the selected participants accordingly). Overall, the duration of the study shall be six (6) months.

If the students assent to participate in the study, I am pleased to inform you that their anonymity and confidentiality will be ensured. Participants' voluntary participation will also be ensured, and the content of the study will solely be used for the purpose of the study.

I am hereby seeking your consent to carry on the study among some undergraduate students.

If granted permission, I promise to abide by all rules and regulations governing such studies in the University of Ghana.

I have attached a copy of my introductory letter from the University of Venda, South Africa for your attention.

For further information, please do not hesitate to contact me either in person or through my contact details provided below.

Thank you.

Yours faithfully,

Joyce Senya Ama Anku

Tel.: +233 242 3737 02

E-mail: joyceanku@yahoo.com

Appendix C:



UNIVERSITY OF GHANA

OFFICE OF THE DEAN OF STUDENT AFFAIRS

Ref. No.: DS/DSA/A12

31st January, 2017

Joyce Senya Ama Anku
P. O. Box AD 116
Adenta Flat
Accra

Dear Madam,

RE: REQUEST FOR AUTHORISATION TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH

Your letter dated 26th January, 2017, on the above subject refers.

This letter comes to grant you permission to conduct a research on your modified topic “The Emergence of Social Media Discourse among Ghanaian University Students: Implications for the acquisition of Academic Literacy”.

Please ensure that your programme would not in any way obstruct University activities.

Thank you.

Sincerely,



Prof. F. K. E. Nunoo
Dean of Student Affairs

cc: Hall Masters

Appendix D

P. O. Box AD 116
Adenta-Flat
Accra-Ghana

20th Jan., 2015.

The Dean,
Office of the Dean of Students,
Valley View University
Oyibi-Accra.

Dear Sir/Madam

REQUEST FOR AUTHORISATION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN VALLEY VIEW UNIVERSITY

My name is Joyce Senya Ama Anku, a doctoral student of the University of Venda, South Africa. I am conducting a research on the topic: “The Emergence of Social Media Discourse among Ghanaian University Students: Implications for the acquisition of academic literacy”.

The study is being conducted under the supervision of Prof. Ernest K. Klu and Dr. L.M.P. Mulaudzi of the University of Venda, South Africa, and Pro. GSK Adika of the University of Ghana, Language Centre.

This is a qualitative and a netnographic study (a virtual form of ethnographic research); thus, it will require all participants to form part of a common social media platform of their choice. The study also requires me to sample participants’ class assignments and exercises to ascertain their demonstration of academic literacy skills. In addition, at the end of the period, some active members on the social media platform created by the

participants will be selected for key informant interviews, which will be tape-recorded (I shall inform the selected participants accordingly). Overall, the duration of the study shall be six (6) months.

If the students consent to participate in the study, please be assured that their anonymity and confidentiality will be assured. Participants' voluntary participation will also be ensured, and the content of the study will solely be used for the purpose of the study.

I am hereby seeking your consent to carry on the study among some undergraduate students.

If granted permission, I promise to abide by all rules and regulations governing researchers in Valley View University.

I have attached a copy of my introductory letter from the University of Venda, South Africa for your attention.

For further information, please do not hesitate to contact me either in person or through my contact details provided below.

Thank you.

Yours faithfully,

Joyce Senya Ama Anku

Tel.: +233 242 3737 02

E-mail: joyceanku@yahoo.com

Appendix E

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

I am, Joyce Senya Ama Anku, a doctoral student of the Department of English, University of Univen, South Africa. I am researching on the topic, ‘The emergence of social media among Ghanaian university students: Implications for the acquisition of academic literacy’. This is a qualitative and a netnographic study (a virtual form of ethnographic research); thus, it will require that all participants form part of a common social media platform. The study also requires me to sample your class assignments and exercises to ascertain your demonstration of academic literacy skills. In addition, at the end of the period, some active members on the social media platform we shall create will be selected for key informant interviews (I shall inform the selected participants accordingly).

Firstly, you will have to fill-in a consent form if you agree to participate in this study. Second, the study requires you to fill-in a questionnaire where you provide information on bio-data and your social media experiences. It also seeks your views on the specific social media site you will prefer to be used for the study.

Kindly note that any information you provide will be treated with utmost confidentiality. You will also not be identified in any of the study reports. You will remain anonymous in all verbal and written records and reports.

For further information, contact me either in person or through:

Phone number: +233 242 37 37 02

E-mail address: joyceanku@yahoo.com

Thank you!

Appendix F

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

I have read the participant information sheet and the nature and purpose of the study has been explained to me by Ms Joyce Senya Ama Anku, a doctoral student of the University of Venda, South Africa.

I understand that I needed to provide my telephone number or any social media account detail of my choice that will be used in this study. I further understand that I needed to participate in a group discussion on the social media platform I have chosen or that which all of us, the participants and the researcher, have agreed to.

I also understand that all the information that I will provide will be treated as confidential and will be used for research purposes only.

During the study, I shall be available for all activities of the study as well as freely give information to facilitate the study. I understand that while the information gained during the study may be published, I will not be identified anywhere in the study through my real names.

I am also aware that I can withdraw from the research study without penalty.

Signature of the participant.....

Name of the participant.....

Date.....

For further information, please contact:

Joyce Anku

Tel.: +233 242 3737 02

E-mail: joyceanku@yahoo.com

Appendix G

QUESTIONNAIRE

Thank you for willing to take part in this study. My name is Joyce Senya Ama Anku, a doctoral student at the University of Venda, South Africa, specialising in English language. The study seeks to understand the emergence of social media discourse among Ghanaian university students and its implication on their acquisition of academic literacy.

Kindly note that your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you can withdraw from the study at any point, without any penalty whatsoever. You will remain anonymous throughout the study and as such **do not write your name** anywhere on this questionnaire. The information you provide will be treated with utmost confidentiality. Further information is contained in the Participant Information and Informed Consent sheets, which you will be required to read and fill-in before responding to this questionnaire. Could you respond to the following questions, accurately? This may take you about 15 minutes.

Check the option most applicable to you.

A. Personal Details

1. Age:

16 – 20

21 – 25

26 -30

30 – 35

2. Sex:

Male

Female

3. What Grade did you make in English language in the WASSSCE and/or NOV-DEC?

Appendix H: Sample Social Media Chats (Set 1)

+233 26 454 4256 created group "Academic Writing 1"

10/5/2015 7:16:54 PM: Dtrmnd2rchmagoals□□□□□→□: Hello

10/5/2015 7:17:11 PM: +233 24 300 2294: Hi

10/5/2015 7:17:46 PM: Dtrmnd2rchmagoals□□□□□→□: Letz start with the intro.aha

10/5/2015 7:17:55 PM: +233 54 863 5396: Very smart @class rep

10/5/2015 7:18:24 PM: Dtrmnd2rchmagoals□□□□□→□: U noe x our duty

10/5/2015 7:18:32 PM: +233 54 981 3197: Yhhh

10/5/2015 7:22:13 PM: +233 26 744 6719: Hehe

10/5/2015 7:27:08 PM: Dtrmnd2rchmagoals□□□□□→□: Plzz here r d groups for d assignment the lecturer gave to us..so plzz try n contact ur group members..ok

10/5/2015 7:27:46 PM: +233 57 550 2009: Ok

10/5/2015 7:28:20 PM: Dtrmnd2rchmagoals□□□□□→□: <image omitted>

10/5/2015 7:28:21 PM: Dtrmnd2rchmagoals□□□□□→□: <image omitted>

10/5/2015 7:28:23 PM: Dtrmnd2rchmagoals□□□□□→□: <image omitted>

10/5/2015 7:29:36 PM: +233 24 300 2294: Ok

10/5/2015 7:29:41 PM: +233 54 863 5396: Where are they

10/5/2015 7:30:10 PM: Dtrmnd2rchmagoals□□□□□→□: Av dropped it

10/5/2015 7:31:13 PM: Dtrmnd2rchmagoals□□□□□→□: D network x really bad so u wait for a somtym.

10/5/2015 7:35:11 PM: +233 57 550 2009: 10x

10/5/2015 7:35:39 PM: Dtrmnd2rchmagoals□□□□□→□: Uw

10/5/2015 7:36:20 PM: +233 57 095 5611: I don't lyk my grp

10/5/2015 7:37:24 PM: Dtrmnd2rchmagoals□□□□□→□: Sorry i cant

10/5/2015 7:39:52 PM: +233 54 863 5396: Gud @ course rep bt u shd ve added contacts to make identification of group membas easily

10/5/2015 7:40:14 PM: +233 54 981 3197: Course rep if u can add our numbers to our ID Number so dat we can contact dem easily

10/5/2015 7:40:50 PM: Dtrmnd2rchmagoals□□□□□→□: Okk..ll do exactly dat

10/5/2015 7:41:04 PM: +233 54 863 5396: Ok

10/5/2015 7:41:08 PM: Dtrmnd2rchmagoals□□□□□→□: Bt u ll get it morrow

10/5/2015 7:41:14 PM: +233 54 981 3197: Kk

10/5/2015 7:41:20 PM: +233 24 300 2294: Yeah he is right

10/5/2015 7:41:23 PM: +233 57 550 2009: Kk

10/5/2015 7:41:36 PM: Dtrmnd2rchmagoals□□□□□→□: I ll

10/5/2015 7:52:51 PM: +233 24 279 8239: Ok

10/5/2015 8:09:42 PM: +233 26 807 8968: Eerhmm..pls...I can't see my ID no. in any of the grps

10/5/2015 8:09:51 PM: +233 26 807 8968: Am 10572714

10/5/2015 8:10:35 PM: +233 54 397 5585: Mine appeared twice

10/5/2015 8:11:10 PM: +233 26 807 8968: Is it ok to add me to grp 1?

10/5/2015 8:11:39 PM: Dtrmnd2rchmagoals□□□□□→□: Meet me morrow @Ben

10/5/2015 8:11:43 PM: +233 20 505 4173: U aa in grp 5 @ mhizz silver

10/5/2015 8:12:17 PM: Dtrmnd2rchmagoals□□□□□→□: Mhizz u r in group 5

10/5/2015 8:12:53 PM: +233 26 807 8968: Oh ok...av seen it now..thanx□□□□

10/5/2015 8:13:41 PM: Dtrmnd2rchmagoals□□□□□→□: □□□

10/5/2015 8:14:47 PM: +233 26 454 4256: □

10/5/2015 8:15:16 PM: Dtrmnd2rchmagoals□□□□□→□: Eii x dz all u cud do

10/5/2015 8:18:54 PM: +233 26 734 2160: Ah

10/5/2015 8:21:51 PM: +233 26 946 8787: Er helo□□

10/5/2015 8:41:27 PM: +233 57 360 2838: Course reps pls only id no. won't help

10/5/2015 8:41:41 PM: +233 26 856 1996: Yh

10/5/2015 8:42:23 PM: +233 26 856 1996: We need numbers also so we can contact our members

10/5/2015 8:42:30 PM: +233 26 447 4350: I agree @ Efua

10/5/2015 8:43:51 PM: Dtrmnd2rchmagoals□□□□□→□: Ohh i already told u guys that i ll send it again..dz tym,ll include d num.plzz x it ok?

10/5/2015 8:44:16 PM: +233 26 734 2160: Nice idea

10/5/2015 8:44:52 PM: Dtrmnd2rchmagoals□□□□□→□: Yh

10/5/2015 8:45:14 PM: +233 26 447 4350: Yh.. yh. I'm gud
10/5/2015 8:45:25 PM: +233 26 856 1996: Yj
10/5/2015 8:45:32 PM: +233 26 856 1996: Yh
10/5/2015 9:11:38 PM: +233 24 527 6157: I cnt find my group
10/5/2015 9:12:25 PM: +233 24 527 6157: My ID is 10557266
10/5/2015 9:12:27 PM: Dtrmnd2rchmagoals□□□□□→□: Plzz did u wryt ur name
10/5/2015 9:12:42 PM: +233 24 527 6157: Yh
10/5/2015 9:13:40 PM: Dtrmnd2rchmagoals□□□□□→□: U r part of group 7
10/5/2015 9:14:20 PM: Dtrmnd2rchmagoals□□□□□→□: Someones id came twice
10/5/2015 9:14:36 PM: Dtrmnd2rchmagoals□□□□□→□: So plss replace urs over der
10/5/2015 9:29:21 PM: +233 20 109 4364: wat ar guys actualy discusin
10/5/2015 9:41:07 PM: +233 26 744 6719: Chartered Accountant □□□□□□□□□□
10/5/2015 9:41:31 PM: +233 24 603 5867: Hahaha
10/5/2015 9:42:25 PM: +233 20 109 4364: y ar u□□□
10/5/2015 9:43:10 PM: +233 26 744 6719: Adey feel your name□□
10/5/2015 9:43:58 PM: +233 20 109 4364: ihr
10/5/2015 9:46:55 PM: +233 24 603 5867: De name dey be k3k3
10/5/2015 9:49:00 PM: +233 20 109 4364: lol
10/6/2015 7:34:28 AM: +233 57 550 2009: Gm
10/6/2015 7:35:06 AM: +233 57 550 2009: How many hr av critical fnkn dis morning
10/6/2015 7:37:31 AM: +233 26 447 4350: Gm
10/6/2015 7:37:44 AM: +233 54 386 4255: Gm
10/6/2015 7:38:45 AM: Dtrmnd2rchmagoals□□□□□→□: Mornin
10/6/2015 7:59:09 PM: +233 26 447 4350: Hello.... ge..class rep, pls u sed we'll ve the
phone numbers of our group members 2day.... still nothin..
10/6/2015 8:01:43 PM: +233 26 744 6719: Hehe ashoq
10/6/2015 8:02:21 PM: +233 57 550 2009: She saf she 4gt am sure
10/6/2015 8:05:19 PM: +233 26 447 4350: Lol..
10/6/2015 8:07:10 PM: Dtrmnd2rchmagoals□□□□□→□: Ohh noo..
10/6/2015 8:07:46 PM: Dtrmnd2rchmagoals□□□□□→□: Jx got to d hostel

10/6/2015 8:09:23 PM: +233 57 550 2009: Ok

10/6/2015 10:55:51 PM: Dtrmnd2rchmagoals□□□□□□→□: <image omitted>

10/6/2015 10:55:53 PM: Dtrmnd2rchmagoals□□□□□□→□: <image omitted>

10/6/2015 10:55:54 PM: Dtrmnd2rchmagoals□□□□□□→□: <image

Appendix I: Sample Social Media Chats (Set 2)

08/10/2015, 7:50 PM - +233 24 561 3247 created group "UGRC 110 (GROUP 16)"

09/10/2015, 10:08 AM - Prince (Aca): Hello every one

09/10/2015, 10:08 AM - Prince (Aca): Pls intro by ur name

09/10/2015, 10:08 AM - Prince (Aca): M prince or nana kofi

09/10/2015, 10:08 AM - Prince (Aca): Deputy class rep

09/10/2015, 10:08 AM - +233 20 729 7787: Hello gm

09/10/2015, 10:08 AM - Prince (Aca): 😊

09/10/2015, 10:09 AM - +233 57 811 2666: 😊😊

09/10/2015, 10:09 AM - Prince (Aca): Waitin???

09/10/2015, 10:09 AM - Prince (Aca): The names

09/10/2015, 10:09 AM - +233 20 729 7787: I'm nana badu

09/10/2015, 10:09 AM - Prince (Aca): Cool

09/10/2015, 10:10 AM - +233 57 811 2666: Am Abigail

09/10/2015, 10:10 AM - Prince (Aca): Yay...😊

09/10/2015, 10:10 AM - Prince (Aca): Pls abigail wah is ur local name

09/10/2015, 10:11 AM - Prince (Aca): Ur twi name😊

09/10/2015, 10:11 AM - +233 57 811 2666: Maame Ama

09/10/2015, 10:11 AM - Prince (Aca): Anoda maame ama

09/10/2015, 10:11 AM - +233 57 811 2666: 😊😊

09/10/2015, 10:12 AM - +233 57 811 2666: Where x de oda 1?

09/10/2015, 10:12 AM - Nana Akua (Aca): I'm nana akua

09/10/2015, 10:12 AM - Prince (Aca): Yay nana akua

09/10/2015, 10:12 AM - Prince (Aca): Shes der ooo@nana ama

09/10/2015, 10:13 AM - +233 57 811 2666: Heloo Akua

Ma sis nas me😊

09/10/2015, 10:13 AM - Nana Akua (Aca): Hello

09/10/2015, 10:13 AM - +233 57 811 2666: Name

09/10/2015, 10:13 AM - +233 57 811 2666: Hope u gud?

09/10/2015, 10:14 AM - Prince (Aca): 😊😊

09/10/2015, 10:14 AM - Nana Akua (Aca): Yhs nd u

09/10/2015, 10:14 AM - Prince (Aca): Umm i hv 3 new cntacts...badu abi bd akua

09/10/2015, 10:14 AM - Prince (Aca): Who else dey hr pls

09/10/2015, 10:15 AM - +233 57 811 2666: Akua, which hall r u?

09/10/2015, 10:16 AM - Nana Akua (Aca): Nelson

09/10/2015, 10:16 AM - Prince (Aca): Akz u

09/10/2015, 10:17 AM - Prince (Aca): amA u?

09/10/2015, 10:17 AM - +233 57 811 2666: Jubilee

09/10/2015, 10:20 AM - +233 20 729 7787: Nelson

09/10/2015, 10:24 AM - Prince (Aca): Akafo annex B

09/10/2015, 10:24 AM - Prince (Aca): 😊😊

09/10/2015, 10:26 AM - +233 20 587 7756: 🙄

09/10/2015, 10:26 AM - Prince (Aca): Yay kusi

09/10/2015, 10:27 AM - +233 20 587 7756: Lol yeah

09/10/2015, 10:27 AM - Prince (Aca): Savd dw
 09/10/2015, 10:27 AM - Prince (Aca): Sup
 09/10/2015, 10:28 AM - +233 20 587 7756: Not a lot chale
 09/10/2015, 10:28 AM - +233 20 587 7756: No homework please 🙄
 09/10/2015, 10:28 AM - Prince (Aca): Sa
 09/10/2015, 10:28 AM - Prince (Aca): Lol
 09/10/2015, 10:28 AM - Prince (Aca): Yes hall work pls
 09/10/2015, 10:29 AM - +233 20 587 7756: 😊
 09/10/2015, 10:35 AM - Prince (Aca): Aww see him
 09/10/2015, 10:36 AM - Prince (Aca): Akus Ama nd Badu whr u dey
 09/10/2015, 10:37 AM - +233 57 811 2666: 👁👁👉
 09/10/2015, 10:40 AM - Prince (Aca): Hihi
 09/10/2015, 10:40 AM - Prince (Aca): Cool
 09/10/2015, 10:40 AM - Prince (Aca): Wyd
 09/10/2015, 10:41 AM - +233 26 313 7235: 😊
 09/10/2015, 10:42 AM - +233 26 411 4627: 🙄
 09/10/2015, 10:43 AM - +233 26 313 7235: 😊
 09/10/2015, 10:45 AM - +233 57 811 2666: On bed,chatting
 09/10/2015, 10:46 AM - +233 26 979 0143: hi
 09/10/2015, 10:49 AM - Nana Akua (Aca): Yh
 09/10/2015, 10:49 AM - +233 57 811 2666: Heloo
 09/10/2015, 10:52 AM - Prince (Aca): Chattin k3k3
 09/10/2015, 10:52 AM - Prince (Aca): Who bi nana
 09/10/2015, 10:52 AM - Prince (Aca): I see u franklin
 09/10/2015, 10:52 AM - Prince (Aca): Davis
 09/10/2015, 10:54 AM - +233 26 411 4627: Class rep wassup
 09/10/2015, 10:54 AM - +233 26 979 0143: Franklin wassup
 09/10/2015, 10:55 AM - +233 20 729 7787: Nana badu
 09/10/2015, 10:56 AM - Prince (Aca): Cool oo
 09/10/2015, 10:56 AM - +233 26 313 7235: 😊
 09/10/2015, 10:56 AM - +233 26 411 4627: 😊👉
 09/10/2015, 10:56 AM - +233 26 411 4627: Nana i dey oo
 09/10/2015, 10:57 AM - +233 26 979 0143: is Ewuradjoa here??
 09/10/2015, 10:58 AM - +233 26 313 7235: 😊👉🐱🐱🐱🐱
 09/10/2015, 10:59 AM - RaHsi: is Ewuradjoa here??

 09/10/2015, 11:00 AM - +233 26 411 4627: Lol
 09/10/2015, 11:30 AM - Prince (Aca): NaNa OpOkU WaRe mma.👊👊

 09/10/2015, 11:30 AM - +233 24 148 1104: am richard you can call me nana kofi😊
 09/10/2015, 11:31 AM - Prince (Aca): U stole ma name
 09/10/2015, 11:31 AM - Prince (Aca): M nana kofi too
 09/10/2015, 11:34 AM - +233 26 979 0143: is Ewuradjoa here??

Yes please

oh nice...watsup

09/10/2015, 11:37 AM - +233 24 148 1104: lol
 09/10/2015, 11:37 AM - +233 24 148 1104: i did what
 09/10/2015, 11:40 AM - Prince (Aca): Circle flood ruff
 09/10/2015, 11:40 AM - Prince (Aca): I dey hr oo
 09/10/2015, 11:43 AM - +233 24 148 1104: again
 09/10/2015, 12:33 PM - +233 56 013 5888: Hi y'all I'm Georgia
 09/10/2015, 12:39 PM - +233 26 313 7235: Where is the lady who argued So much with her little high voice yestee 😊
 09/10/2015, 12:39 PM - Prince (Aca): Lol
 09/10/2015, 12:41 PM - +233 26 313 7235: I've forgotten her name koraa
 09/10/2015, 12:41 PM - +233 26 411 4627: Lol
 09/10/2015, 12:42 PM - +233 26 411 4627: Her name is Laureen
 09/10/2015, 12:42 PM - +233 20 587 7756: 🙄
 09/10/2015, 12:43 PM - +233 26 313 7235: Franklin are you sure?
 09/10/2015, 12:43 PM - +233 26 411 4627: Yes
 09/10/2015, 12:43 PM - +233 26 411 4627: I dont forget names easily
 09/10/2015, 12:43 PM - +233 20 587 7756: Oh yeah yeah laureen
 09/10/2015, 12:44 PM - +233 26 313 7235: Herh but she can talk oo 😊
 09/10/2015, 12:44 PM - +233 20 587 7756: 🙄
 09/10/2015, 12:44 PM - +233 26 411 4627: Ikr 😊 😊
 09/10/2015, 12:45 PM - +233 26 313 7235: Are you the one @ Kusi Appiah 🙄 🙄 🙄
 09/10/2015, 12:46 PM - +233 20 587 7756: 😊 😊 😊 nah nah
 09/10/2015, 12:46 PM - +233 26 313 7235: Ahh okay
 09/10/2015, 12:52 PM - +233 24 613 3957: Hi please
 09/10/2015, 12:52 PM - +233 24 613 3957: What have i done?
 09/10/2015, 12:53 PM - +233 20 587 7756: 😊 😊 😊
 09/10/2015, 12:54 PM - +233 26 411 4627: 🏃
 09/10/2015, 12:54 PM - +233 26 313 7235: Aww Awobae
 09/10/2015, 12:54 PM - +233 26 313 7235: You haven't done anything
 09/10/2015, 12:54 PM - +233 24 613 3957: Don't run. You can be caught.
 09/10/2015, 12:54 PM - Anku: Hi! Dis page is not for discussing ple
 09/10/2015, 12:54 PM - +233 20 587 7756: 🙄
 09/10/2015, 12:55 PM - +233 26 313 7235: I just liked the way you spoke in class dasall
 09/10/2015, 12:55 PM - +233 26 411 4627: 😊 😊 😊
 09/10/2015, 12:55 PM - +233 24 613 3957: Hehe. Yoo maate
 09/10/2015, 12:55 PM - +233 26 411 4627: Laureen watsup
 09/10/2015, 12:55 PM - +233 24 613 3957: Thanks
 09/10/2015, 12:56 PM - +233 26 313 7235: 🙄 🙄 some people are not active in this discourse community
 09/10/2015, 12:56 PM - +233 24 613 3957: Lol
 09/10/2015, 12:57 PM - +233 24 613 3957: Nothing @ Sir Franklin
 09/10/2015, 12:57 PM - Nana Akua (Aca): Lol
 09/10/2015, 12:57 PM - +233 26 313 7235: Hi! Dis page is not for discussing ple

Yes Madam 😊

09/10/2015, 12:57 PM - +233 20 587 7756: 😊

09/10/2015, 12:58 PM - +233 26 313 7235: So How did you guys find the lecture yestee? it was quite fun for me. Walaba you?

09/10/2015, 1:01 PM - +233 54 493 2692: D lecturer x nyc

09/10/2015, 1:02 PM - +233 26 411 4627: lkr

09/10/2015, 1:02 PM - +233 54 493 2692: lyk d way sh tlkz

09/10/2015, 1:02 PM - +233 24 420 9533: 📢 TEAM WISSI 📢 BRINGS TO THE NOTICE OF ALL LEVEL 100s THE COLLECTION AND RETURN OF MATRICULATION GOWNS FRESHMEN 20'15/2016 ACADEMIC YEAR.

Matriculation for 2015/2016 academic year will take place on Saturday, 17th October 2015. Matriculation gowns to be worn by freshmen for the ceremony will be distributed at the following points.

_ Resident L100 freshmen = Hall of residence

Non-Resident Level 100 = college of academic offices

All freshmen should pickup their gowns and return them in Wednesday 21st October 2015.

Powered by 📢 TEAM WISSI 📢

Please kindly share.... Thanks

09/10/2015, 1:05 PM - +233 54 493 2692: Joyce Anku# ma favourite lctrer so far

09/10/2015, 1:05 PM - +233 20 587 7756: 🙄

09/10/2015, 1:05 PM - Prince (Aca): Hihi

09/10/2015, 1:05 PM - +233 26 313 7235: Yeah she x dhope 🙄

09/10/2015, 1:05 PM - Nana Akua (Aca): Lol

09/10/2015, 1:06 PM - +233 26 313 7235: She do all 👍👍

09/10/2015, 1:06 PM - +233 24 662 0130: Hehe

09/10/2015, 1:06 PM - +233 26 313 7235: But let's see as time goes on 😊

09/10/2015, 1:07 PM - +233 20 587 7756: 😊

09/10/2015, 1:07 PM - +233 26 411 4627: 😊

09/10/2015, 1:07 PM - +233 20 587 7756: This boy 😊😊

09/10/2015, 1:07 PM - +233 26 313 7235: Oh What have I said 😊

09/10/2015, 1:08 PM - +233 20 587 7756: 😊

issorai 🙄🙄

09/10/2015, 1:09 PM - +233 54 493 2692: X ok

09/10/2015, 1:09 PM - +233 26 313 7235: Mrs Joyce Anku 🙄

09/10/2015, 1:09 PM - Prince (Aca): <Media omitted>

09/10/2015, 1:10 PM - +233 54 493 2692: Hands up in d Air 4 🙄🙄

09/10/2015, 1:11 PM - Anku: Hi! Dis page is not for discussing ple

09/10/2015, 1:12 PM - +233 54 493 2692: OK Madm

09/10/2015, 1:12 PM - +233 20 587 7756: I told them 🙄

09/10/2015, 1:12 PM - +233 26 313 7235: 😊

09/10/2015, 1:13 PM - +233 24 662 0130: Hehe
 09/10/2015, 1:13 PM - +233 54 493 2692: I'm gone
 09/10/2015, 1:40 PM - +233 24 148 1104: kk obaa georgia
 09/10/2015, 2:00 PM - +233 26 979 0143: Hi! Dis page is not for discussing ple

Yes Madam

09/10/2015, 7:32 PM - +233 26 313 7235: 😊
 10/10/2015, 7:47 AM - +233 24 561 3247: Zao shang hao
 10/10/2015, 8:27 AM - +233 20 729 7787: Guten morgen freunde
 10/10/2015, 10:50 AM - +233 50 562 7475: Good morning
 10/10/2015, 11:07 AM - +233 26 979 0143: Gm
 10/10/2015, 11:12 AM - +233 20 491 6186: Eeiii nana,wat is dat?
 10/10/2015, 11:14 AM - +233 24 613 3957: Its good morning friends in German
 10/10/2015, 11:18 AM - +233 20 491 6186: Eeeeeiii yoo yati wai
 10/10/2015, 12:04 PM - +233 24 420 9533: Important information regarding matriculation for freshmen. Check link for details and share with fellow students.

<http://ugfile.com/ug-matriculation-slated-for-october-17/>

11/10/2015, 6:12 PM - +233 57 848 6909: Pls is our lecturer here
 11/10/2015, 6:12 PM - +233 57 848 6909: Hello
 11/10/2015, 6:17 PM - +233 24 561 3247: Yes she is
 11/10/2015, 6:17 PM - +233 24 561 3247: Am maxwell the course rep for this course
 11/10/2015, 6:31 PM - +233 24 148 1104: kk
 11/10/2015, 7:17 PM - +233 57 848 6909: Maxwell wat is her screen name
 11/10/2015, 7:21 PM - +233 24 561 3247: She can actually see this so just address her
 11/10/2015, 7:21 PM - +233 57 848 6909: Kk
 11/10/2015, 8:36 PM - +233 26 313 7235: Guys😊
 11/10/2015, 8:36 PM - +233 24 561 3247: Yh
 13/10/2015, 6:39 AM - Anku: Pls be reminded that we shall not be meeting this week.

Reading assignments for the week:

1. The relationship between reading and writing.

2. Reading strategies and Methods

13/10/2015, 6:40 AM - +233 20 729 7787: Gm Madame
 13/10/2015, 6:40 AM - +233 20 729 7787: Thank u
 13/10/2015, 6:43 AM - +233 20 942 4877: Thanks
 13/10/2015, 6:57 AM - +233 26 411 4627: Thanks Madam
 13/10/2015, 9:41 AM - +233 26 313 7235: Madam🙏🙏
 13/10/2015, 10:01 AM - +233 54 493 2692: Ok
 13/10/2015, 6:48 PM - +233 26 313 7235: 🔥🔥🔥

14/10/2015, 7:05 PM - +233 24 561 3247: Awoe
 14/10/2015, 10:38 PM - +233 20 066 5239: I hope ders class moro...or
 14/10/2015, 10:39 PM - +233 26 313 7235: Oh yes
 14/10/2015, 10:39 PM - +233 26 313 7235: But there is a reading assignment
 14/10/2015, 10:39 PM - +233 50 135 7535: Madame said she is not coming

14/10/2015, 10:39 PM - +233 50 135 7535: This week
 14/10/2015, 10:40 PM - +233 20 066 5239: So hu ll take us thru....
 14/10/2015, 10:40 PM - +233 20 066 5239: D TA or....we ll join anoda class
 14/10/2015, 10:41 PM - +233 20 587 7756: 😊
 14/10/2015, 10:42 PM - +233 26 313 7235: No! She gave a reading assignment
 14/10/2015, 10:42 PM - Daniel (Aca): I dont fnk any1 wld cm take us thru so dts y we r given d reading assignment
 14/10/2015, 10:43 PM - +233 50 135 7535: Yhh
 14/10/2015, 10:48 PM - +233 20 066 5239: Can u remind mii of wah we were given....
 14/10/2015, 10:48 PM - +233 20 066 5239: I mean d assignment
 14/10/2015, 10:48 PM - +233 20 587 7756: 😊
 14/10/2015, 10:49 PM - +233 50 135 7535: Pls be reminded that we shall not be meeting this week.

Reading assignments for the week:

1. The relationship between reading and writing.
2. Reading strategies and Methods

14/10/2015, 10:56 PM - Daniel (Aca): Pls be reminded that we shall not be meeting this week.

Reading assignments for the week:

1. The relationship between reading and writing.
2. Reading strategies and Methods

14/10/2015, 11:02 PM - +233 20 066 5239: Fnx dearies 😊

14/10/2015, 11:03 PM - Daniel (Aca): Avec plaisir

14/10/2015, 11:04 PM - +233 26 313 7235: Ma a salamma

14/10/2015, 11:05 PM - +233 20 066 5239: Meanin 😊

14/10/2015, 11:09 PM - Daniel (Aca): Ahaaa ask him oo

16/10/2015, 5:27 PM - +233 20 942 4877: Hi

16/10/2015, 5:27 PM - +233 20 942 4877: Umm

The reading assignment

Is it in the book?

16/10/2015, 5:29 PM - +233 24 148 1104: 😊oh yeah

16/10/2015, 5:30 PM - +233 20 942 4877: <Media omitted>

16/10/2015, 5:53 PM - +233 50 562 7475: Please what's the venue and time for matriculation?

16/10/2015, 5:56 PM - +233 20 491 6186: Its around 10:00am

16/10/2015, 6:41 PM - Daniel (Aca): Venue please

16/10/2015, 6:42 PM - +233 24 420 9533: Athletic Oval

16/10/2015, 6:43 PM - Daniel (Aca): Tnx

16/10/2015, 6:45 PM - +233 24 420 9533: U welcome

16/10/2015, 7:17 PM - +233 24 148 1104: 9 oooo

16/10/2015, 7:30 PM - +233 24 148 1104: eeeeeiii wrng info

16/10/2015, 7:39 PM - +233 20 587 7756: 🐱

19/10/2015, 5:09 PM - +233 20 942 4877: Class rep 📢📢📢

19/10/2015, 5:35 PM - Prince (Aca): Yh deputy dey hr

22/10/2015, 2:00 PM - +233 20 942 4877: Class rep
 22/10/2015, 2:05 PM - +233 24 561 3247: Yh
 22/10/2015, 2:05 PM - +233 24 561 3247: Edith suo
 22/10/2015, 2:05 PM - +233 24 561 3247: Sup
 22/10/2015, 2:07 PM - +233 20 942 4877: Check your dm please
 22/10/2015, 2:17 PM - +233 24 148 1104: <Media omitted>

23/10/2015, 9:38 PM - Prince (Aca): Wah dey go on
 23/10/2015, 9:38 PM - +233 24 561 3247: Every bro base ooo
 23/10/2015, 9:39 PM - +233 24 561 3247: I dey see ma guy
 23/10/2015, 9:39 PM - Prince (Aca): Yh oo
 24/10/2015, 12:57 PM - +233 24 148 1104: People are needed to go represent and hype STANDOUT X at music music today..courtesy hall organising committee..GET INVOLVED STANDOUT.. pm me 0241228794(NANA AKUA) if interested
 24/10/2015, 11:27 PM - +233 26 313 7235: 😊
 24/10/2015, 11:28 PM - +233 26 411 4627: Smh
 26/10/2015, 8:49 AM - Prince (Aca): Any dansoman based hr
 29/10/2015, 10:04 AM - +233 20 942 4877: Hi
 29/10/2015, 10:05 AM - +233 20 942 4877: When is the class pls????
 29/10/2015, 10:05 AM - +233 24 033 0036: @edith we r in klas oo
 29/10/2015, 10:06 AM - +233 20 942 4877: 🙏🙏ei
 29/10/2015, 10:06 AM - +233 20 942 4877: Okay
 29/10/2015, 10:06 AM - +233 20 942 4877: Thanks
 29/10/2015, 10:06 AM - +233 24 033 0036: Come we jux started
 29/10/2015, 10:07 AM - +233 20 942 4877: Omw
 29/10/2015, 10:07 AM - +233 20 942 4877: Is there space space at the back?
 29/10/2015, 10:08 AM - +233 24 033 0036: Yhh..use the bck dooor
 29/10/2015, 10:08 AM - +233 20 942 4877: Thanks😊
 29/10/2015, 10:09 AM - +233 24 033 0036: U welcm
 29/10/2015, 10:09 AM - +233 20 942 4877: Room number?
 29/10/2015, 10:09 AM - +233 20 942 4877: Sorry for the disturbance
 29/10/2015, 10:10 AM - +233 24 033 0036: 1
 29/10/2015, 10:12 AM - +233 24 033 0036: Hope u r the one at my bck?@ edith
 29/10/2015, 10:14 AM - +233 20 942 4877: I'm in a black tank top
 29/10/2015, 10:14 AM - +233 20 942 4877: What are you wearing?
 29/10/2015, 10:15 AM - +233 24 033 0036: Okk...am on ur left in a white long sleeves wid black strips
 29/10/2015, 10:27 AM - +233 20 942 4877: All group7 members of the numeracy skills class are being informed of a meeting scheduled for 5:30 today 29/10/15 at the same venue (LOT).
 Thanks

03/11/2015, 12:36 PM - Nana Akua (Aca): Errrrm hello
 03/11/2015, 12:37 PM - Nana Akua (Aca): Can sumone pls help me out here.....how are we supposed to do the prese?
 03/11/2015, 12:37 PM - Nana Akua (Aca): Presentation.*

03/11/2015, 12:40 PM - +233 20 942 4877: She said type and save on your pendrive
03/11/2015, 12:40 PM - +233 20 942 4877: That's all I know
03/11/2015, 12:41 PM - Nana Akua (Aca): Type what?
03/11/2015, 12:41 PM - Nana Akua (Aca): Newais thanks
03/11/2015, 12:42 PM - +233 20 942 4877: Write a paragraph on any topic of your choice
Which shows all the qualities of all good paragraph
03/11/2015, 12:44 PM - Nana Akua (Aca): Ohk thanks I get it now
03/11/2015, 7:50 PM - Anku: This is for ur information : IA for UGRC 110 will be held on Sunday, 15th Nov. 2015.
03/11/2015, 7:50 PM - Anku: Watch out for notices to confirm time n venues.
03/11/2015, 7:53 PM - Daniel (Aca): Yes Madam
03/11/2015, 8:01 PM - +233 24 613 3957: Yes please. Thank you
03/11/2015, 8:45 PM - +233 20 066 5239: It takes 15 trees to produce the amount of paper that we use to write one exam. Join us in promoting the noble cause of saving trees. Say No To Exams.
03/11/2015, 9:15 PM - Daniel (Aca): U lie,u ll do d IA
03/11/2015, 9:19 PM - +233 20 066 5239: Hehehehehehe LIVE WIRE BLOWOUT****
05/11/2015, 12:05 PM - +233 20 942 4877: Class rep
05/11/2015, 12:17 PM - +233 20 942 4877: Nvn
05/11/2015, 12:17 PM - +233 20 942 4877: Nvm
11/11/2015, 8:19 AM - Prince (Aca): what was the assignment about pls
11/11/2015, 8:25 AM - RaHsi: I think we were to write an introduction to the paragraph we were to present last week.... I think
11/11/2015, 8:32 AM - Prince (Aca): Oh ok
11/11/2015, 8:32 AM - Prince (Aca): Tnks
11/11/2015, 8:39 AM - Daniel (Aca): ☺☺☺☺ our mate isnt certain oooo
11/11/2015, 8:41 AM - Daniel (Aca): Is a thought.Well,i think we are to write an introductory paragraph or possibly a complete essay.
11/11/2015, 9:34 AM - +233 24 355 2129: We re to write one intrductory paragraph and one body paragraph
11/11/2015, 9:35 AM - +233 24 355 2129: So we can complete the intrductoru paragraph we started in class and write a body paragraph for dat same topic
11/11/2015, 9:36 AM - +233 24 355 2129: Or we can write an introductory paragraph for the body paragraph that we already had for the presentation
11/11/2015, 9:37 AM - +233 24 355 2129: Or we can put the two different paragraphs together and present them
11/11/2015, 9:37 AM - +233 24 355 2129: Thats it
11/11/2015, 9:37 AM - RaHsi: Ooooh okay
11/11/2015, 9:38 AM - RaHsi: Thanks
11/11/2015, 9:38 AM - +233 57 379 8828: Ayt thnx
11/11/2015, 9:39 AM - +233 54 344 3663: Pls which time are we having the IA
11/11/2015, 9:41 AM - +233 24 561 3247: I guess we will know by tommorow
11/11/2015, 9:41 AM - +233 24 561 3247: In class
11/11/2015, 10:08 AM - +233 24 148 1104: u can continue that of last week
11/11/2015, 10:13 AM - +233 24 148 1104: exactly

11/11/2015, 10:32 AM - +233 24 148 1104: the IA is on sunday
11/11/2015, 11:44 AM - +233 24 662 0130: At 10am
11/11/2015, 11:45 AM - +233 57 632 3707: U sure
11/11/2015, 11:46 AM - +233 24 662 0130: Yup
11/11/2015, 11:47 AM - +233 57 632 3707: Thanks bro
11/11/2015, 11:59 AM - +233 24 561 3247: Lol
11/11/2015, 12:09 PM - +233 24 662 0130: Yo jonky
11/11/2015, 12:16 PM - +233 57 632 3707: Haha
11/11/2015, 1:42 PM - +233 24 933 3506 left
11/11/2015, 3:27 PM - +233 24 148 1104: Breaking news!
the former President of Liberia President Dr Charles Taylor has died in prison today in Holland. The late war criminal died of heart attack.

12/11/2015, 12:18 PM - +233 24 561 3247: Things to note for the I.A

#Name of lecturer- Joyce Anku

#Group number - 16

#Day -Thursday

#Time - 9:30- 11:30 am

12/11/2015, 12:18 PM - +233 24 561 3247: From Mrs Joyce Anku

12/11/2015, 12:18 PM - Prince (Aca): So

12/11/2015, 12:45 PM - +233 57 379 8828: Thanks

12/11/2015, 1:12 PM - +233 26 411 4627: 🙌☐

12/11/2015, 1:40 PM - +233 57 632 3707: Thanks

12/11/2015, 1:58 PM - +233 24 561 3247: Lol

12/11/2015, 8:41 PM - Daniel (Aca): GE Pals,here are some group discussions n presentations u might want to attend tomorrow purposely for the IAs : UGRC 110,UGRC 150 n Classics.Please pm me for details if willing to attend.Open to all so concerned.

13/11/2015, 10:14 PM - Daniel (Aca): We are advised on time allocation,that we try to process our ideas as fast as possible to help get enough time to write since we have only 1 hr to do a lot.

13/11/2015, 10:38 PM - RaHs👤: 🙌☐

13/11/2015, 10:38 PM - +233 26 979 0143: Thank u

14/11/2015, 9:41 AM - +233 57 848 6909: Pls tym n venue for de IA

14/11/2015, 9:45 AM - +233 24 148 1104: diff venues

14/11/2015, 9:46 AM - +233 24 148 1104: so chek ur id number

14/11/2015, 9:48 AM - +233 20 942 4877: <Media omitted>

14/11/2015, 10:05 AM - +233 57 848 6909: Tnx

14/11/2015, 10:19 AM - Prince (Aca): SECTION ONE : STRUCTURE OF AN ESSAY

LESSON NO. 6: TOPIC SENTENCE

The topic sentence is a prescriptive grammatical term to describe the sentence in an expository paragraph which summaries the main idea of that paragraph. Also known as a focus sentence or mini-thesis, it encapsulates or organizes an entire paragraph. Its use is considered standard because it increases reading accessibility. Structurally, a good topic sentence has following qualities.

Topic and Controlling Idea

First Sentence

Link to Thesis

Link to the Previous Paragraph

TOPIC AND CONTROLLING IDEA

A topic sentence has two major parts;

- (i) Topic: It introduces the subject of the paragraph.
- (ii) Controlling Idea: It gives direction to the paragraph.

EXAMPLES

(i) Topic Sentence: To be an effective CEO requires certain characteristics.

The topic is "To be an effective CEO" and the controlling idea is "certain characteristics".

(ii) Topic Sentence: Cooking requires a number of different skills.

The topic is "Cooking" and the controlling idea is "a number of different skills".

(iii) Topic Sentence: Remodeling a kitchen successfully requires research and a good eye.

The topic is "Remodeling a kitchen" and the controlling idea is "requires research and a good eye".

(viii) Topic Sentence: Teen pregnancy may be prevented by improved education.

The topic is "teen pregnancy may be prevented" and the controlling idea is "improving education".

Notes Prepared By: Prof. Shahbaz Asghar (0333-8602196)

FIRST SENTENCE

Although a topic sentence may appear anywhere in a body paragraph, in an academic essay it often appears at the beginning. It is usually the first sentence in a body paragraph.

EXAMPLES

(i) There are three reasons why Canada is one of the best countries in the world. First, Canada has excellent health care system. All Canadians have access to medical services at a reasonable price. Second, Canada has a high standard of education. Students are taught by well-trained teachers and are encouraged to continue studying at University. Finally, Canada's cities are clean and efficiently managed. Canadian cities have many parks and lots of space for people to live. As a result, Canada is a desirable place to live.

14/11/2015, 10:36 AM - +233 24 148 1104: 🖱
14/11/2015, 10:39 AM - +233 57 379 8828: Thanks
14/11/2015, 11:30 AM - Prince (Aca): Welkm
14/11/2015, 7:02 PM - +233 20 066 5239: Pls hu x a Catholic...
14/11/2015, 7:14 PM - Daniel (Aca): We are please advised to read on types of Introduction n types of conclusions.Gud luck all.
14/11/2015, 7:23 PM - Nana Akua (Aca): Just that?
14/11/2015, 7:24 PM - Daniel (Aca): 😊😊😊😊
14/11/2015, 7:24 PM - Daniel (Aca): No please,u add that to all wat we r taught
14/11/2015, 7:25 PM - Nana Akua (Aca): So hws is the structure like?
14/11/2015, 7:30 PM - Daniel (Aca): Basically on d ability to identify d features of an aca piece of writing,eg,a passage n u write out d features u identify in d passage.Add a little "flesh" to d features n show an example of it d passage if possible.
14/11/2015, 7:31 PM - Nana Akua (Aca): Ohk
14/11/2015, 7:32 PM - Nana Akua (Aca): Thanks.....cuz I did not noe wad to shark
14/11/2015, 7:32 PM - Daniel (Aca): Also on how to develop a paragraph,identify d techniques used to achieve coherence,completeness,
14/11/2015, 7:34 PM - Daniel (Aca): Nt forgetting of how a paragraph is introduced or concluded.
14/11/2015, 7:34 PM - Daniel (Aca): My pleasure.
14/11/2015, 7:34 PM - +233 20 066 5239: Fnx
14/11/2015, 7:35 PM - Daniel (Aca): Any1 wt any adds,please lets share
15/11/2015, 9:15 AM - +233 20 942 4877: Hi
15/11/2015, 9:15 AM - +233 20 942 4877: Pls what's the ladies name again
15/11/2015, 9:17 AM - +233 24 561 3247: Joyce Anku
15/11/2015, 12:25 PM - +233 24 148 1104: The statement "Pray for Paris" verbally has become a problem in Kumasi
15/11/2015, 12:26 PM - +233 54 493 2692: 😊😊😊
15/11/2015, 12:27 PM - +233 54 493 2692: OK den to avoid any pro* Play 4 Palis*
15/11/2015, 12:38 PM - Nana Akua (Aca): Pls wats going on in Paris?
15/11/2015, 12:39 PM - +233 57 379 8828: Terrorism
15/11/2015, 12:39 PM - +233 57 379 8828: Bombing and shooting...over 150 pple dead

15/11/2015, 12:40 PM - Nana Akua (Aca): 😊😊
 15/11/2015, 12:40 PM - Nana Akua (Aca): Oh thanks
 15/11/2015, 1:24 PM - Prince (Aca): Who ia in ugrc 150 grup 2
 15/11/2015, 1:25 PM - Prince (Aca): Critical thinkin time table pls
 (0554153662)

19/11/2015, 9:29 AM - Anku: Good morning
 19/11/2015, 9:30 AM - Nana Akua (Aca): Good morning
 19/11/2015, 9:30 AM - Anku: I believe we can do our presentation dis morning
 19/11/2015, 9:30 AM - +233 20 066 5239: Gud mrnin
 19/11/2015, 9:30 AM - +233 20 066 5239: 🙏🙏
 19/11/2015, 9:31 AM - Anku: Why
 19/11/2015, 9:34 AM - +233 26 979 0143: mmm
 19/11/2015, 3:16 PM - +233 54 493 2692: hw wz d presentation
 19/11/2015, 3:26 PM - +233 20 066 5239: Nyc

25/11/2015, 8:12 PM - RaHsi👤: Hi please were we given any assignment?
 25/11/2015, 8:12 PM - +233 20 491 6186: Y3s
 25/11/2015, 8:13 PM - +233 50 135 7535: 🙏🙏Assignment?
 25/11/2015, 8:13 PM - RaHsi👤: Lol please what was it
 25/11/2015, 8:13 PM - +233 26 411 4627: eiiiiiii
 25/11/2015, 8:21 PM - Daniel (Aca): Please talk oooo
 25/11/2015, 8:21 PM - +233 54 493 2692: What? 😊😊
 25/11/2015, 8:21 PM - +233 20 066 5239: Read...unit 7
 25/11/2015, 8:21 PM - +233 20 066 5239: Sorry 6
 25/11/2015, 8:21 PM - +233 54 493 2692: God
 25/11/2015, 8:22 PM - +233 26 979 0143: Ah no assignment.....
 25/11/2015, 8:29 PM - RaHsi👤: Oh okay
 25/11/2015, 8:29 PM - RaHsi👤: Thanks
 25/11/2015, 8:30 PM - +233 26 411 4627: 😊😊
 25/11/2015, 8:46 PM - Daniel (Aca): Tnx
 26/11/2015, 8:50 PM - Richard (Aca): 🙏
 03/12/2015, 9:28 AM - +233 20 942 4877: Where are we having the class pls?
 03/12/2015, 9:29 AM - +233 26 411 4627: same old venue
 03/12/2015, 9:29 AM - +233 20 942 4877: Thanks
 03/12/2015, 9:31 AM - +233 26 411 4627: 🙏
 03/12/2015, 9:35 AM - +233 20 587 7756: 🙏
 03/12/2015, 3:55 PM - +233 57 733 4464: Hi
 03/12/2015, 3:55 PM - +233 57 733 4464: Pls can sm1 frm gp 3 pm me
 03/12/2015, 3:56 PM - Nana (Aca): 🙏
 03/12/2015, 3:57 PM - +233 24 148 1104: kk
 08/12/2015, 3:58 PM - +233 57 733 4464: Hi
 08/12/2015, 3:59 PM - +233 57 733 4464: Pls,ani 1 in grp 3
 08/12/2015, 3:59 PM - +233 54 523 9557: 🙏

08/12/2015, 3:59 PM - +233 26 411 4627: ☐☐

08/12/2015, 4:00 PM - +233 57 733 4464: Pls can I of u pm me

08/12/2015, 4:00 PM - +233 54 523 9557: Eii,sowi,fink am in 2 rada 😊

08/12/2015, 4:01 PM - +233 26 411 4627: 😊

08/12/2015, 4:01 PM - +233 57 733 4464: Wat r de plans for meetn to discuss our assignment?

08/12/2015, 4:01 PM - +233 26 411 4627: we'll meet on thursday

08/12/2015, 4:07 PM - +233 24 613 3957: Please id create the page today

08/12/2015, 4:09 PM - +233 54 523 9557: Wah?

08/12/2015, 5:21 PM - +233 24 148 1104: create the grp

08/12/2015, 5:21 PM - +233 24 148 1104: nd lets share our ideas

08/12/2015, 5:44 PM - +233 54 523 9557: Wey grup memberz dar?

10/12/2015, 7:09 AM - Anku: Good morning! I believe u r making a head way regarding de assignments.Feel free to contact me shd u need any clarification.

10/12/2015, 8:48 AM - +233 24 148 1104: ayt madam

10/12/2015, 11:25 AM - Daniel (Aca): Zoe,please pm me n let me call

10/12/2015, 12:10 PM - +233 54 493 2692: Madam I dnt belong 2 any grp

10/12/2015, 12:10 PM - +233 54 493 2692: Plsss

10/12/2015, 1:02 PM - +233 24 561 3247: Lol

10/12/2015, 1:02 PM - +233 24 561 3247: Ask join any group available

10/12/2015, 1:02 PM - +233 54 493 2692: 😊😊😊

12/12/2015, 8:23 AM - Prince (Aca): Madam pls ar our papers in?

12/12/2015, 9:57 AM - Anku: Which ones?

12/12/2015, 10:00 AM - +233 54 493 2692: IA plz

12/12/2015, 10:03 AM - Anku: Oh kk

16/12/2015, 6:48 AM - Richard (Aca): Success doesn't come to you. You go to it. Set goals for the day and make sure you attain them . Don't make excuses. Let the focus be on the bigger picture not few hard times. Don't stay in bed unless you can make money in bed. Let gooo

GOOD MORNING

16/12/2015, 8:18 AM - +233 54 523 9557: Mmm

Fm tho

16/12/2015, 11:35 AM - +233 20 066 5239: Gm

17/12/2015, 8:02 AM - +233 54 493 2692: Gm

17/12/2015, 9:11 AM - Prince (Aca): I hv to go for ma xray

17/12/2015, 9:11 AM - Prince (Aca): lx almost m turn...can i leave the work to the class rep

17/12/2015, 9:26 AM - Prince (Aca): 10564173 ma id no jux in caae

17/12/2015, 12:41 PM - Anku: Group 1 leader, pls call me when u r done with ur class.

17/12/2015, 1:12 PM - Prince (Aca): Eii

17/12/2015, 1:13 PM - Nana (Aca): Lol

17/12/2015, 1:35 PM - Anku: Group 3 leader, pls pm me when u r done with ur class.

Appendix J: Sample Interview Transcript

I wish to thank you for taking time to meet with me today. My name is Joyce Senya Ama Anku and I would like to talk with you about my PHD project. The study aims at exploring, describing and explaining the emergence of social media discourse among Ghanaian university students and its implications on their acquisition of academic literacy. This study is being conducted under the supervision of Prof Ernest K. Klu and Dr. L.M.P. Mulaudzi of the University of Venda, South Africa, and Prof GSK Adika of the University of Ghana, Language Centre.

The interview should take about 30 minutes. Although I will be taking some notes during the session, I can't possibly write fast enough to get all your views down so I will be recording. Because we are on tape, please be sure to speak up so that I don't miss your comments.

All your responses will be kept confidential. This means that your interview responses will only be shared with the research team members and we will ensure that any information we include in our report does not identify you as the respondent. Remember, we don't have to talk about anything you don't want to and you may ask for the recorder to be switched off at any time or end the interview if you wish to.

I Do you have any questions about what I have just explained? Question?

R No please

I Are you willing to participate in this interview?

R yeah, why not. I'm cool

I okay so can I go ahead and start the recording?

R yes please

I alright, thank you, we will start with personal details yeah

R ok

I please can you quickly tell me about yourself, your name, age

R I'm 22 right now, I'll be 23 in December

I ok and the name

R I'm Christian XYZ

I okay fine, tell me about your social media experience

R my social media experience, well I have been on facebook for a couple of years. I tweet, I mean I am on twitter too, Instagram, it has been a good experience because I basically use my social media platform to I don't really do it motivate or to the main thing is to influence that is the main aim of my social media platforms I use

I to influence, what do you mean by to influence

R I mean to share influential things, to share beneficial things, things that people will benefit from

I okay

R inspirational stuff

I okay, alright we will come to some of this again, which secondary school did you attended

R O'relly Senior High

I where?

- R O'relly Senior high school
- I okay what grade did you make
- R What?
- I what grade did you get for Wassce or Novdec?
- R 14
- I okay,so which program are you reading in the university
- R economics, philosophy and dance studies
- I Okay now let's move to social media uses and practice, when did you acquire your very first mobile phone
- R I think that was after JHS
- I after JHS
- R Yes please
- I what level are you in
- R I'm going to 200 when school reopens
- I okay so mean after some 5 years ago?
- R Yes please
- I means you were in senior high school or before you entered senior school
- R before i entered senior school
- I did you have preference for any type of phone
- R yes I did
- I what type of phone did you have preference for
- R Sony Ericson
- I okay, was the use of social media part of this reason, part of the reason why you chose Sony Ericson?
- R it wasn't social media it was games
- I ok
- R games was the main reason, I don't know if games is considered as social media which I don't think so
- I yes to some extent we can state games also under social media

- R ok
- I okay, so when did you start using either a mobile phone, a computer or tablet for social media communication
- R for social media?
- I communication
- R I think when I was in shs, when I entered shs. I don't really remember which level or which form but it was when I was in shs
- I social media to chat
- R yes
- I alright so who introduced you to social media
- R I heard about facebook in church and whatsapp a friend introduced but Instagram and twitter I think through facebook I saw people using that I joined
- I are you still using social media
- R yes please
- I why, any reason?
- R mainly is the source of entertainment now
- I the source of entertainment, did you say mainly or for you?
- R mainly
- I mainly?
- R uhuh
- I okay, just to get the record straight how long have you been using social media
- R ohh actually like 4years or let me see its 2016 so maybe 3 years
- I 2?
- R 3,
- I ok 3. Let me go a bit further, what satisfaction do you get from being on social media
- R what satisfaction do you get being on social media is that the question?
- I yes, that is the question in other words why do you use social media ?

- R social media helps mainly, for me it helps in entertainment that is one of the main reasons that is what social media is for. Entertainment news, and to reconnect with friends
- I okay, entertainment for you, news will follow. You said news, what kind of news
- R Entertainment news, music, movies, basketball sports
- I okay, alright and to connect with friends, are you on whatsapp?
- R yes please
- I apart from whatsapp do you use any other social media site
- R as in social media for texting?
- I as in general
- R yes I have facebook, I have titter, I have Instagram I have whatsapp
- I okay, among all these which of the social media platforms do you use frequently and why
- R I use whatsapp frequently
- I okay, so you are an active user on whatsapp
- R yeah
- I so when did you become very active on whatsapp
- R since I downloaded whatsapp I have been active that is say 2 years ago, I have most of my close friends on whatsapp and it is easy to communicate so
- I so that is the reason why you use whatsapp, okay so on the average how many messages do you send or receive on your personal page in a day
- R wow
- I we are talking about only whatsapp
- R only whatsapp that's a lot
- I how many do you errm
- R from how many contacts or message
- I just number of messages, so let's look at it from the number you send and then the number you receive so on the average how many messages do you send
- R on the average let's say maybe 20 messages
- I in a day?

R in a whole day?

I yes a whole day=

R a whole day I send about 1000 messages

I 10,000?

R not 10,000, I can't say a particular figure but a lot

I ok what about between 5 and 20, 20 and 50 like that

R okay then let's go to between 500 to 700 or 700 to 1000

I ok that's what you send, what of those that you receive

R I receive a lot, from 1000 to 1500

I so on the average how many hours do you think you spend on social media a day

R how many hours, wow? I dont really

I in just a day, so let's look at 1 to 5 hours a day, 6 to 10 hours a day

R no I don't think I do that

I so if you look at your social media usage, how many hours do you think you spend in totality

R I whatsapp maybe from around 7pm till the time I sleep, maybe 5 hours a day. Me I don't chat that much during the day but in the evening when I am going to sleep that is when I do the chatting

I alright thank you, now you see on whatsapp there are a lot of what is referred to as text messaging language like LOL, SMH and those things. who introduced you to those text messaging language that is if you use them, do you use them?

R yes I use them

I if you are tracing where they come from whom will say introduced you

R I can't say a particular person introduced me I think it's just one of those random words you find around and you start using them I cant say a particulate person introduced me

I so how do you manipulate the English word to fit those social media language

R well I don't see myself using , I don't normally use short hand but when I'm writing say shaking my head I use only shaking my head that's SMH and that is it I don't, or I write maybe you this girl the SMH, so that is the connection. I write my sentence send it and write my short hand

- I okay
- R I don't know if I answered it right
- I you mean that you don't come up with your own short hand or text message language
- R Yeah yeah
- I okay but can you give me some examples of those text message language that you use frequently
- R thank you lord Jesus that is TYLJ
- I do you write it in caps or small letters?
- R capital letters
- I oh so its just so thank you lord Jesus,okay any other
- R then kiss my teeth or commot for there
- I please again
- R kiss my teeth or commot for there
- I so how do you shorten it?
- R KMT
- I okay the commot for there (laughing)
- R that is the pidgin for leave there
- I how do you shorten it,
- R is the same KMT
- I but let me ask o, if I write KMT meaning kiss my teeth and somebody also write KMT and the person is referring to commot for there is that not going to distort the meaning?
- R it's like when you write ...yes, sometimes some people add F to the KMT like KMFT when they want to specify commot for there
- I oh ok,
- R yeah but normally it's just KMT
- I and when it is used you understand it perfectly
- R yeah or normally if the translation is comot just as comot but the pidgin word for it

- I do you have any abbreviation that have different meaning when you use them in full but the same abbreviation
- R right now the only one I can think of is LOL but that one it has different meaning but though but when you write LOL everybody knows that is laugh out loud
- I so how is that possible that when you use LOL and you don't mean laugh out loud will the other person understand the specific meaning you want to assign to LOL in that context?
- R sometimes it depends on the context or what you write that will make the one you are chatting with understand what you mean.
- I now let me find out.. these abbreviations.. are they unique to only you and your friends or do other people also use them?
- R other people also use them not only me and my friends
- I so in your case why would you want to use LOL or KMT rather than the formal vocabulary say writing it in full any motivations why you would use the shorthand instead of writing the words in full
- R no motivation, I think it just comes as I said early on I don't really write short hand just LOL and when you are writing well sometimes laziness of writing in too on my part makes me write that most at times I should say
- I ok,now when you are chatting with your friends do they sometimes correct you when you don't use these abbreviations properly?
- R Abbreviations?
- I As in LOL, KMT do they sometimes correct you if you don't use them the way they know them to be used
- R No No, well atleast for my friends, nobody has ever corrected me No No. I think every time I use them they understand it
- I they understand it. Ok so you think because they understand it even when if you don't use it the way they will use it because of that they do not correct you
- R No
- I alright, when you are writing an academic work do you inadvertently use short hand this short hand or social media language
- R in my academic? No please
- I okay any reason why you think you don't?
- R Are u asking any reason why I don't use it?

- I yes, in you essays and class
- R because It is not acceptable
- I it's not acceptable, okay alright, but do you think the way currently you chat on whatsapp or any other social media platform has the potential to affect your Standard English usage I'm talking about punctuation, spelling, capitalization writing in general do you think the way you use whatsapp or any social media now is affecting or has the potential to affect you
- R It has the potential to affect me, I remember when I completed SHS in all my conversation, my texting I used short hand a lot
- I ok
- R I realized it was getting out of hand
- I ok, alright
- R I forgot spelling of simple words and I noticed it was because of the use of short hand and I put a stop to it
- I ok, alright, now let's move on to social media use in academic work, do you sometimes seek assistance from your friends on difficult topics through social media?
- R Mmmm, not general but maybe when we are in a class together we sometimes form groups so we discuss questions together not individually I think somebody will ask questions about or something but as a group we do it
- I as a group
- R as a group we do it,
- I so maybe if you have a group work you set up a social media say a whatsapp platform then you discuss that
- R yes please
- I okay, alright, so are your friends... let's say in this group are they able to explain the things to you through the same social media platform?
- R yes please
- I they are able to?
- R yes
- I can you give me some examples?
- R come again

- I can you give me some examples?
- R examples, I don't get the question
- I as in you had a question or some difficulty somewhere and you and your friends you had to set up a social media group to seek clarification on the problem...
- R I think last semester one of my usual, general math, general mathematics so before our exam they have to go bring questions, they post on the group, pictures, and people or colleagues who can solve, solve them and they take pictures and post back
- I Does this happen all the time or once a while or only during exams
- R once you have a question and you post there, we are ready to help if I can I will, if somebody can he will but normally it happens during exams we just discuss questions like we chat in groups, we don't really post it individual
- I you don't usually?
- R I'm saying apart from exams we don't usually post our answers or questions in groups we meet as a group, yeah we meet we don't do it on WhatsApp.
- I okay so on the average, how many hours do you spend reading academic material on social in a day. Reading academic material on social media how many hours do you spend on the average in a day
- R on the average.....(silent)
- I Do you read academic material on social media
- R once a while when I see them, but I don't often do that
- I okay
- R not at all
- I but when you are in school. Okay? On the average how many hours do you spend on your academic materials, maybe reading your book, assignments, writing...
- R I spend a lot of time normally is from the evening around 8 to 11 maybe 3hrs 30mins to 4hrs
- I ok, ok, so while you are reading your academic material do you sometimes respond to people's messages and also send them whiles reading or doing your assignment?
- R yes yes
- I are you able to blend it well

- R it is distraction but it happens
- I do you think teaching and learning should be incorporated into social media
- R yes please, I think. Sometimes too I learn on youtube
- I Okay, so you're saying your lecturers should form social media groups for your courses so that even after class too you can even interact with them by asking questions and getting responses
- R it is very necessary
- I okay can you explain further why you think it is necessary
- R oh I think sometimes in the classrooms and the lecture halls people don't normally, we don't normally get what goes on there after study moment but when you are given a lot of opportunity maybe the second time or the second time to go over the work or when it's been explained to the student I think the understanding will be much clearer based on what you have heard for the first time I think it will make very good sense
- I okay, okay
- R that is only once or going to learn or going to try or figure it out yourself, I think sometimes in the lecture hall you can't have the courage to ask all the questions you want to ask but one on one on social media it will be free enough to ask all the questions you want to ask
- I so you think social media can be used to enhanced teaching and learning
- R yes please
- I so which social media platform will you prefer for this type of exercise and why
- R I think I would prefer youtube
- I you prefer?
- R youtube
- I youtube? Okay why
- R because that's the best social media for chatting and I mean for video content
- I okay so you use youtube also for chatting?
- R you can
- I okay, so if I have it
- R yeah that's why there will be comments and maybe messages it wouldn't be a very inflow communication as of whatsapp unless both of you are actively online

- I okay so errm, on youtube you can ask your teacher a question and your teacher will also respond like the way it happens on other networks?
- R I'm talking about in terms of video
- I oh video? Ok, ok so it means your teacher will be able to record and send to you
- R yes please
- I is that not going to take a similar form also as the lecture hall
- R I don't get you
- I okay probably you would like to explain to me about the YouTube how it functions
- R oh okay I think uhm maybe whiles lectures is going on there might be some recording and maybe after lecture the lecturer will be available for some particular time within some particular hours that students can go online and communicate with him
- I through youtube?
- R yes please
- I okay so youtube is your preferred social media if you want to incorporate teaching and learning into social media
- R or skype too
- I skype?
- R yeah skype
- I okay, alright thank you very much Christian
- R okay
- I do you have any questions for me?
- R Uhhhmm
- I concerning the interview
- R No!
- I Alright, thank you for your time.
- R My pleasure!

