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Influence of TikTok-Based Content on Academic Performance of Primary School Pupils in Gwagwalada Area Council, FCT, Abuja: A Documentary Analysis

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Abstract*: Short-video platforms increasingly reach children below the minimum age set by the platforms themselves, yet little Nigerian research examines what this means for pupils in primary school. This paper reviews documentary evidence on the influence of TikTok-based content on the academic performance of primary school pupils in Gwagwalada Area Council, Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja. Using a documentary (secondary-data) design, it draws on national household survey data, a regulator's survey of children's media use, a large meta-analysis of screen media and academic performance, Nigerian studies of social media and students, and the platform's own terms of service. The evidence shows near-universal household phone ownership in Nigeria, evidence of substantial under-13 viewing of TikTok in a comparable setting, and mixed findings on academic effects: overall screen time is weakly related to performance, while the type of activity matters. No study located directly measures TikTok exposure and academic performance among primary pupils in the FCT. The paper therefore offers a conceptual model, testable propositions, and a research agenda for primary data collection in Gwagwalada.*

Keywords: TikTok, short-video content, academic performance, primary school pupils, underage social media use, Gwagwalada

Introduction

Mobile phones are now a routine part of Nigerian family life. The 2024 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) reports that 90% of households own a mobile phone, compared with 43% that own a television and 9% that own a computer (National

Population Commission [NPC] & ICF, 2025). Children who do not own a phone can therefore still meet online content through the devices of parents, older siblings and relatives.

TikTok is a short-video platform whose main feed recommends the next video automatically. Its terms of service state that a person must be at least 13 years old to use the platform (TikTok, n.d.). Primary school pupils in Nigeria are typically younger than this. Even so, evidence from other countries suggests that many children under 13 watch TikTok content. In the United Kingdom, for example, the regulator Ofcom (2025) reported that 32% of children aged 3 to 12 watch videos on TikTok.

Primary education builds the reading, numeracy, attention and study habits on which later schooling depends (Federal Republic of Nigeria [FRN], 2013). If short-video viewing displaces homework, reading or sleep, or shapes how pupils view school, it could matter for learning. Whether it does in Gwagwalada Area Council is not yet known, and this paper examines what the existing documentary evidence can and cannot tell us.

Statement of the Problem

Teachers and parents often express concern about children's phone use, but the discussion in Nigeria is driven mainly by opinion. Published Nigerian studies on TikTok and academic performance focus on undergraduates (Falope et al., 2025), and studies on younger pupils tend to look at social media in general rather than TikTok (Adegboyega, 2020). There are very few studies carried out within Gwagwalada Area Council that has reviewed TikTok's exposure and academic performance among primary pupils in the FCT. Parents, schools and education authorities in Gwagwalada therefore lack local evidence to guide decisions.

Research Questions

1. What does available data show about pupils access to phones in Gwagwalada Area Council, FCT-Abuja?

2. What does existing evidence show about exposure of pupils to TikTok content in Gwagwalada Area Council, FCT-Abuja?
3. What does existing evidence show about the relationship between screen media or TikTok use and academic performance in in Gwagwalada Area Council, FCT-Abuja?

Conceptual Clarification and Theoretical Framework

TikTok-based content refers to short videos delivered through a personalised feed, including music and dance clips, comedy, challenges, children's entertainment and educational clips. **Academic performance** refers to a pupil's measurable attainment, such as continuous assessment and examination scores, together with behaviours linked to attainment such as attention, reading and homework completion.

Uses and gratifications theory. Blumler and Katz (1974) argued that audiences are active and choose media to meet needs such as entertainment, information, social connection and escape. For pupils, TikTok may satisfy entertainment and belonging needs, and an
effortless feed makes it easy to choose over school-related activities. Younger children have less capacity for self-regulation, so the rules set by adults become important.

Social cognitive theory. Bandura (1977, 2001) argued that people learn by observing models and that behaviour arises from the interaction of personal factors, environment and behaviour. Children may imitate speech, dances and attitudes seen in videos. Content that
models curiosity could support school engagement, while content that presents school as dull could weaken it. Parents' and older siblings' own viewing acts as a further model.

Methodology

Design: The study is a documentary analysis of secondary data. It does not collect data from human participants.
Sources and search: Sources were identified through targeted web-based searches of journal, repository, official statistical and regulator websites in September 2026. Search terms combined TikTok, social media, screen time, academic performance, primary pupils, Nigeria, and the FCT. **[AUTHORS: repeat and record your own searches in named databases such as AJOL, Google Scholar, Scopus and ERIC, with dates and search strings, and add any relevant studies you find.]**
Inclusion criteria: A source was included if it (a) reported data or findings on children's or students' media use, TikTok, or screen media in relation to learning outcomes, or gave official information on access or platform rules; (b) came from a peer-reviewed journal, an official statistical programme, a regulator, or the platform itself; and (c) could be traced to an accessible URL or DOI. Sources with internally inconsistent reporting or references that could not be verified were excluded.
Analysis: Findings were summarised in a matrix and synthesised thematically against the four research questions. The evidence was not pooled statistically, because the studies differ in populations, measures and designs.

Findings from the Documentary Evidence Digital access context (Research Question 1)

The 2024 NDHS, which includes the FCT among its state-level estimates, reports that 90% of Nigerian households own a mobile phone, and that ownership of information and communication technology is higher in urban than in rural areas (NPC & ICF, 2025). It also
reports that 45% of the household population is under 15 years old, and that 26% of women aged 15 to 49 used the internet in the previous 12 months. Among women, 62% own a
mobile phone and 30% own a smartphone.

These figures suggest that phones are widespread in households but that smartphone and internet use is more limited, which implies unequal exposure to online video among children. Access is likely to depend on household income, location and whether parents own smartphones. [AUTHORS: extract the FCT and, where available, Gwagwalada-relevant indicators from the full NDHS tables and report them here.]

Underage exposure (Research Question 2)

TikTok requires users to be 13 or older and says it will terminate accounts it suspects belong to underage users (TikTok, n.d.). This rule is based on age declared at sign-up, so it cannot prevent a child from watching on an adult's account or device. In the UK, Ofcom (2025) found that 32% of children aged 3 to 12 watch videos on TikTok, compared with 68% of those aged 13 to 17. These data are from a different country and cannot be assumed to
describe Nigeria, but they show that a minimum-age rule does not reliably keep younger children away from the platform. No comparable Nigerian survey of children's TikTok viewing was found.

Screen media, TikTok and academic performance (Research Question 3)

Table 1: Summary of the main evidence reviewed

Source	Population and design	Main finding	Relevance
Adelantado-Renau et al. (2019)	Systematic review of 58 cross-sectional studies, meta-analysis of 30; children and adolescents aged 4 to 18	Overall screen media use was not associated with academic performance; television viewing and video games were inversely associated	Content and activity type matter more than total time
Falope et al. (2025)	615 undergraduates in two Kwara State universities; cross-sectional survey	Respondents reported that TikTok use did not negatively affect their academic performance	Nigerian TikTok evidence, but self-reported, undergraduate, and with a low reliability coefficient (0.6) reported for the performance scale
Adegboyega (2020)	200 primary school teachers in Ilorin; descriptive survey	Teachers viewed pupils' social media use as having a	Primary-level evidence using teachers as
Source	**Population and design**	**Main finding**	**Relevance**
		negative influence on social behaviour	informants, but not TikTok-specific and not about academic performance
Ofcom (2025)	UK national survey of children and parents	32% of 3 to 12 year olds watch TikTok videos	Shows underage exposure can be substantial
NPC & ICF (2025)	Nationally representative Nigerian household survey	90% of households own a mobile phone	Shows the device access through which children may be exposed

The largest body of evidence is the meta-analysis by Adelantado-Renau et al. (2019). It found no association between overall screen media use and academic performance among children and adolescents, but found that television viewing and video games were associated with poorer performance. The authors concluded that each screen-based activity should be analysed separately. Because the included studies were cross-sectional, the review cannot show that screen use causes lower performance.

The Nigerian TikTok evidence located is at university level. Falope et al. (2025) surveyed 615 undergraduates in Kwara State and reported that most did not consider their TikTok use harmful to their academic performance. The authors' own reliability figure for the academic performance scale was 0.6, below the 0.7 usually treated as acceptable, and both the measure and the finding rely on students' own reports. For primary pupils, Adegboyega (2020) surveyed 200 teachers in Ilorin and found that teachers saw pupils' social media use as harming social behaviour, but the study did not examine TikTok or academic performance.

Gaps (Research Question 4)

The review identifies four gaps. First, there is no located study of TikTok exposure and academic performance among primary pupils in the FCT. Second, Nigerian evidence on TikTok comes from undergraduates and cannot be assumed to apply to

children who are still learning to read and manage time. Third, most evidence is cross-sectional and self-reported, so it cannot separate cause from association. Fourth, few studies measure content type or parental supervision, which the wider literature suggests are important.

Discussion

The evidence does not support the claim, common in public discussion, that TikTok necessarily harms pupils' academic performance. Nor does it show that TikTok is harmless. The meta-analysis suggests that total screen time is a weak guide, and that the kind of activity and content matters (Adelantado-Renau et al., 2019). This is consistent with uses and gratifications theory: what a child watches, and why, is likely to matter more than the minutes alone. It is also consistent with social cognitive theory: content that models attitudes to learning, and the viewing habits of adults at home, may shape how children approach school.

The limited Nigerian evidence is mixed. Undergraduates in Kwara State did not report harm (Falope et al., 2025), while primary school teachers in Ilorin saw social media as harming pupils' behaviour (Adegboyega, 2020). These findings concern different populations, outcomes and informants, so they should not be treated as contradictory or combined.

For Gwagwalada, the relevant question is therefore not whether pupils use TikTok but which pupils are exposed, to what content, under what supervision, and with what effect on attention, reading, sleep and homework.

Conceptual model and propositions

The following propositions are offered for testing. They are hypotheses derived from the reviewed literature, not findings.

- **P1:** Exposure to entertainment-oriented TikTok content is negatively related to pupils' academic performance, whereas exposure to educational content is not.
- **P2:** The relationship in P1 is weaker where parents or guardians supervise or co-view.
- **P3:** Exposure differs by household device access and school type (public or private).

Implications and Recommendations

These recommendations follow from the evidence reviewed and are deliberately modest.

1. **Researchers and the FCT Universal Basic Education Board** should collect local data on pupils' media use and learning outcomes before drawing firm conclusions or adopting restrictions.
2. **Parents and guardians** should know that the platform's minimum age is 13, supervise the content children watch on shared devices, and prefer content designed for children. Adelantado-Renau et al. (2019) recommend supervision and reduction of screen media use as strategies for supporting academic success.
3. **Schools** can include short digital-literacy sessions for pupils and parents, and can ask teachers to record observations of attention and homework habits, which would provide data for later research.
4. **Education and child-protection authorities** should note that age rules based on self-declared age do not prevent underage viewing, and should consider child online safety guidance suited to primary school families.

Limitations

The review relies on a small number of sources and is not a full systematic review. Much of the evidence comes from other countries or from older students, and most of it is cross-sectional. No source directly answers the research question for Gwagwalada Area Council, so the findings are indirect and cannot be generalised.

Conclusion and Research Agenda

Existing documentary evidence shows that phones are widely available in Nigerian households, that children below the minimum age can and do watch TikTok in comparable settings, and that the link between screen use and academic performance depends on the activity rather than the time alone. It does not show whether TikTok content affects the

academic performance of primary school pupils in Gwagwalada. A follow-up primary study should use a descriptive survey of teachers and parents in a sample of public and private primary schools, with school records for performance, measures of content type and supervision, ethical approval and parental consent, and tests of propositions P1 to P3.

Declarations

Ethics: The study used published and publicly available secondary sources and involved no human participants. **Conflict of interest: There are no conflict of interest**

Author contributions: All authors equally contributed to the publication of the paper.

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