



THE INFLUENCE OF TIME SPENT ON TIKTOK ON THE WRITING SKILLS OF DAY SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN MOIBEN SUB-COUNTY, UASIN-GISHU COUNTY, KENYA

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Abstract:

TikTok is notably one of the most consumed social media sites worldwide and is speedily becoming the world's top short video site. Literature shows an evident relationship between TikTok usage and writing skills. The relationship can either be positive or negative depending on several factors, such as time. Writing skills such as sentence formation, spelling, use of vocabulary, and grammar are affected by the use of TikTok among students. This research aimed to find out the influence of time spent on TikTok on the English composition writing skills among day secondary school students. The research was carried out in Moiben sub-county, Uasin-Gishu County, Kenya. The theory that guided this study's framework was social learning theory by Albert Bandura. Case study research design was employed in this research. To collect data, semi-structured questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussions (FGDs) were used. The target population was day secondary school students in Moiben sub-county, Kenya. A pilot study was carried out to test validity and reliability. A total of two hundred and sixty-three students and ten teachers made up the sample size. This sample size was determined through multi-stage sampling. Data analysis was done using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. The findings proved that there is a definite association between the amount of time spent on TikTok and students' English composition writing skills. Long hours on TikTok reduced time that could be used to practice writing skills

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and increased their chances of unconsciously internalizing TikTok language, which later trickles into their composition writing. The beneficiaries of the findings are expected to be teachers of English, the Ministry of Education (MOE), and various education stakeholders. Through a thorough understanding of the influence of TikTok on English composition writing skills of learners in day secondary schools in Moiben Sub- County, the Ministry of Education and the various education stakeholders will be able to formulate guiding policies and procedures that will ensure appropriate usage and consumption of TikTok among these learners.

Keywords: social media, TikTok, English composition writing skills, day secondary school students, Moiben sub-county

1. Introduction

The onset of the social media age has brought tremendous changes to people's lives. Social networking sites are being introduced to people every day, and they are affecting every aspect of life for both the young and the old. Many scholars report that students are signing up to these sites and using them in a variety of ways (Deepa, 2020; Hubane, 2021). A 2024 study projected that by the end of 2025, social media users globally would reach 4.41 billion (Ngundo, 2024). One of these sites is TikTok, which is witnessing millions of downloads each year (Stats Counter Global Statistics, 2022).

TikTok is among the latest social media sites, which came after popular ones like Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Snapchat, LinkedIn, WhatsApp, YouTube, and Instagram (Stats Counter Global Statistics, 2022). The app is popular among young people. At its launch, its target audience was young people between the ages of fourteen and twenty years (TikTok, 2025). The site has over one billion Monthly Active Users (MAUs). Obasi (2024) notes that by January 2021, it was the most downloaded social media application, and by the first quarter of 2022, it had over two billion downloads.

The site allows users to share and watch short-form videos. These videos range from three seconds long to sixty minutes long. Users can also connect and interact with followers(friends) through messaging. Another popular activity on the site is online contests. Users are able to challenge each other to creative online trends such as dancing, lip-syncing, and fashion. It can also be used to push an agenda or opinion and disseminate information very quickly in a short span of time.

Demographics show that a large percentage of TikTok users are students in secondary and tertiary institutions. Geopoll's 2023 research on local media usage in Africa displayed TikTok as the second most used app in Africa. USIU Africa (2020) demonstrated that TikTok was the second most used app among fourteen- to twenty year-olds with Snapchat being the most used app among them. This data affirmed that secondary school students who fall within these age brackets are signing up and using TikTok.

Consequently, the use of TikTok among these young people affects their academic performance and achievement (Obasi, 2024). One area noted to have been influenced is that of language, specifically the language skill of writing. Since the language present on social media sites like TikTok is usually non-standard, it is usually full of expressions that are generally unacceptable in the standard English language. When students spend time on TikTok, there may be a subtle competition between English language and TikTok language (Chan *et al.*, 2022). Learners may experience difficulties with their register awareness of what to use in their English compositions and what is not appropriate. This effect can be more profound among day secondary school students since they get to interact with smartphones in the evening hours after school, unlike those in boarding schools who do not get a chance to interact daily with a smartphone (Obasi, 2024). Therefore, this study sought to investigate the influence of time spent on TikTok on the English composition writing skills among day secondary school students in Moiben sub-county.

2. Literature Review

Literature shows that much of students' time is consumed by TikTok. Some studies further reveal that this time spent on TikTok can have a positive influence on students' writing skills, while others view time spent on TikTok as undermining students' writing. Writing is an important skill that is necessary for language fluency and proficiency. It is considered the most complex of all language skills and thus calls for more attention and practice to produce symbols. Some of the skills required to write a good composition in Kenyan secondary schools include sentence formation, use of correct spelling, appropriate vocabulary, editing, and correct grammar, among others. This therefore calls for keen attention from students and constant practice so as to write well.

TikTok may be a distraction to good writing skills as it introduces them to slang and other non-standard expressions in language (Asare *et al.*, 2022). Asare *et al.* (2022) attribute long hours on TikTok and activities there to language trickling into the composition writing of secondary school students. This may affect their writing skills, as Liu (2023) points out that most secondary school students in China have had TikTok take over their leisure time and thus affect their academic performance.

Acebes (2024) noted that TikTok's design distinctively promotes a highly engaging user base and an addictive nature to retain users on the app as long as possible. Users therefore find themselves spending a lot of time on the app or going to the app time after time. Acebes (2024) also notes that due to this TikTok design, students' academic productivity has been affected. Nutakor and Israel (2022) show that students log onto TikTok at the slightest opportunity and can spend one or more hours scrolling on the platform. Nkoma, Ndung'u and Ntarangwe (2022) found that students in Nairobi secondary schools spent two to five hours on social media sites daily. TikTok was recorded as the most used app among these students

Some of the scholars who argue that time on TikTok can positively impact students' language include Noiya and Patty (2023). In their paper titled 'Social Media Revolution', they outline that when social media sites like TikTok are well handled and utilized, they can be useful for students' personal study time, and teachers can utilize them as a teaching and learning tool. In the study, some students attested to improved vocabulary due to TikTok content. Khasanweh (2023) outlined that TikTok positively influences other language skills like reading and speaking, but there is little positive influence on writing skills.

Albert Bandura's social learning theory purports that paying attention or giving time to an observed behaviour can influence one's cognitive skills and behaviour (Bandura, 1969). This theory helps to examine whether the amount of time students dedicate to TikTok can influence their writing behaviour. It can aid in answering the question of whether language on TikTok is a source of errors or a source of improvement for students' writing in day secondary schools.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The research design employed in this research was a multiple case study, which allows the research to look at intricate aspects in their natural contexts (Annamalah, 2024). When it comes to multiple case studies, the focus shifts from a single case to several cases (Hunziker & Blankenagel, 2024). Having several secondary schools participate in this research allowed for this research design since each school was looked at as a bounded context. The influence of TikTok on students' writing skills was then looked at across each of these schools.

3.2 Location of the Study

The location of this research was Moiben sub-county situated in Uasin-Gishu County, Kenya. Moiben sub-county is one of the six sub-counties found in Uasin-Gishu County. The sub-county has five wards, namely: Moiben, Sergoit, Kimumu, Tembelio and Karuna/Meibeki. The population of the sub-county is one hundred and eight-one thousand, three hundred and thirty-eight (181 338). Most of this population are middle-income citizens (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2019). The economic activities practised are maize farming and trading. This implies that households can afford at least one smartphone, thus making smartphones accessible to students, who may interact with TikTok.

The sub-county has twenty-six day secondary schools. Since the sub-county is located in the urban part of the county, electricity and internet are usually available, which increases the chances of smartphone use and access to sites like TikTok for students. Hence, the location was appropriate for this study.

3.3 Target Population

The target population for this research comprised all day secondary school students in Moiben sub-county. The Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (2019) records that Uasin Gishu County has a total of eighty-four thousand, nine hundred and sixty-nine (84 969) secondary school students. Out of these, ten thousand, nine hundred and ninety-six (10 996) are in Moiben sub-county. Out of this number, the exclusion criteria were applied to those students in boarding schools.

3.4 Sample Size and Sampling Procedure

In sampling, multi-stage sampling was used in the selection of the day secondary school students who participated. According to Okechi *et al.* (2024), multi-stage sampling divides a population into clusters and lets the researcher use a series of stages in the selection of units to investigate them.

The sample size was determined with the aid of what Mugenda and Mugenda term a statistically significant sample size. They outline that for a sample size to be considered statistically significant for social research, it has to be 10% to 30% of the population. Using Cochran's formula (1977):

Since the population of the students is ten thousand, nine hundred and ninety-six (10 996), the estimated population in 5 schools was: 10 996 students are in 33 schools. So, the population estimate in 26 schools will be:

$$10996/33 * 26 = 8666.66 = 8666$$

$$\text{Therefore, } 8666/26 * 5 = 1666.54.$$

Estimated population in 5 schools = 1666 students.

Estimated population of Forms 3 and 4 = $1666 / 2 = 833$.

Using Cochran's simplified formula (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2013):

$$n = (Z^2 * p * q) / d^2$$

Where:

$Z = 1.96$ (for 95% confidence level),

$p = 0.5$ (estimated proportion),

$q = 1 - p = 0.5$,

$d = 0.05$ (margin of error).

Calculation:

$$n = (1.96)^2 * 0.5 * 0.5 / (0.05)^2 = 384.16 = 384$$

Using the finite population correction formula:

$$nf = n / (1 + ((n - 1) / N))$$

$$n = 384,$$

$$N = 833,$$

$$nf = 384 / (1 + ((384 - 1) / 833)) = 384 / 1.4596 = 263.$$

Sample size = 263.

With Cochran's simplified formula outlined by Mugenda and Mugenda (2013) the sample size was two hundred and sixty-three students. Using stratified sampling, two hundred and sixty-three students were selected from the five schools.

For the selection of the schools, stratified sampling was used. The clusters used were the environmental settings, that is, the urban, peri-urban, and rural. Two schools were picked from the urban settings, two from the peri-urban setting, and one from the rural setting. The next stage involved the selection of students from these schools through proportionate stratified sampling since each school and class differed in population. This ensured gender and class unbiased. Three schools from the urban and peri-urban centers had fifty-three student participants each, while the rest of the schools had fifty-two students each. Therefore, the research had twenty-six to twenty-seven student participants from each class.

Random sampling was used for gender representation. The researcher sampled thirteen to fourteen male students and thirteen to fourteen female students, depending on the population of each selected class.

When it came to sampling of teacher participants, purposive sampling was employed since the research required teachers of English to participate. From each school, two teachers of English were sampled, making a total of ten teacher participants.

3.5 Research Instruments

Three research instruments were used in this study. They were: questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussions.

3.5.1 Questionnaires

For the questionnaires, a semi-structured questionnaire was given to each student participant. This was in consideration of the large number of student participants. The questionnaires consisted of both open-ended and closed-ended questions. This was administered through the drop-and-pick method.

3.5.2 Interviews

With ten teachers of English participants, interviews were considered best for data collection among them since the number was low, thus making interviews manageable. Interview sessions were organized based on each school's convenient time when the teachers were available.

3.5.3 Focus Group Discussions

Focus Group Discussions helped to collect qualitative data from the students since it allowed expression of feelings and opinions on the issue of time spent on TikTok and its effect on writing skills. With the aid of the Languages Department from each school, an appropriate time was organized when students sat in groups of six to ten and discussed the questions with the researcher as the moderator.

4. Data Analysis

Descriptive analysis was used for the analysis of quantitative data, while thematic analysis was used to analyze qualitative data.

To generate frequency distributions and percentages, Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 26.0, was employed to run descriptive analysis. Thereafter, tables were used to summarize the data.

NVivo (Lumivero) was used to run thematic analysis, thus putting qualitative data into themes. This was presented in narrative form.

5. Results And Discussion

5.1 Response Rate

5.1.1 Questionnaire Return Rate

The study targeted two hundred and sixty-three day secondary school students. Out of the two hundred and sixty-three questionnaires administered, two hundred and forty-seven were returned. This made up a 94% response rate, which was appropriate for this study.

5.1.2 Interview Response Rate

All ten teachers of English targeted for this study participated, therefore giving a response rate of 100%.

5.1.3 Focus Group Discussions

The research aimed at a total of five focus group discussions in each school, with each group comprising six to eight students. All the focus group discussions were held, translating to a 100% response rate.

5.2 Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Table 1: Age of Student Respondents

Age	Frequency	Percent (%)
14-18	127	51.4
19-21	116	47
Non-responses	4	1.6
Total	247	100

A significant number of student respondents fall within the fourteen-to-eighteen-year-old age bracket, with a percentage of fifty-one point four (51.4%), while those within the nineteen-to-twenty-one age bracket were at forty-seven percent (47%). A total of four students did not respond to this question, and this made up one point six percent (1.6%) of the total number of respondents. This data suggested that many of the Kenyan teenagers are secondary school-going students. These two age groups have therefore been exposed to expected English composition writing skills in secondary school. They are also considered among the most digitally literate age groups in Kenya, and therefore there is a high likelihood of these students having experiences with social sites such as TikTok. Having most student respondents aged fourteen and above was helpful for this research since that was the target population.

Table 2: Class of Student Respondents

Form	Frequency	Percent (%)
Three	95	38.5
Four	141	57.1
Non-responses	11	4.5

The research was carried out among Form Three and Form Four classes since they have been taught both the foundational and advanced writing skills required in secondary schools. The results show that 57.1% of the respondents were Form Four students while 38.5% were Form Three students.

5.3 Quantitative Findings

5.3.1 Phone Ownership and Possession

Table 3: Phone Ownership

Do You Own A Phone	Frequency	Percent (%)
Yes	90	36.4
No	150	60.7
Non-responses	7	2.8
Total	247	100

Data indicated that a considerable number of the student respondents (36.4%) owned a smartphone. These results implied that day secondary school students are accessing social sites such as TikTok through their personal smartphones; thus, they may be exposed to TikTok language.

Table 4: Other Phones Accessed

Whose Phone Do You Use If You Do Not Own One	Frequency	Percent (%)
Father	18	7.3
Mother	59	23.9
Sister	38	15.4
Brother	25	10.1
Friend	16	6.5
Other	19	7.7
Non-responses	72	29.1
Total	247	100

For the students who did not own a smartphone (60.7%), the research further inquired if they had access to smartphones in any other way. Table 1.4 demonstrates that most of them use smartphones belonging to their family members or a friend.

5.3.2 Time Spent on TikTok

The time spent on TikTok by student respondents was examined among student respondents to find out whether or not it affected students' English composition writing skills.

Table 5: Time Spent on TikTok

Approximate Hours on TikTok	Frequency	Percent (%)
Less than an hour	73	29.6
1-2 hours	86	34.8
2-3 hours	46	18.6
More than 3 hours	35	14.2
Non-responses	7	2.8
Total	247	100

The data showed that the majority of the students (34.8%) spent one to two hours daily on TikTok, 29.6% spent less than an hour, 18.6% spent two to three hours, while 14.2% spent more than three hours daily on TikTok. With the consideration that these days secondary school students spend an average of six to eight hours in school, these hours on TikTok consume a large part of their daily routine. The results indicate that TikTok forms a major part of the students' daily habits, and this may result in frequent exposure to non-standard language present on the site. Many hours on the site may repeatedly expose the students to flawed language, thus compelling them to absorb it and use it in speech or writing. Consequently, this may have an adverse effect on the English composition writing skills of the students.

5.4 Qualitative Findings

Qualitative data from teacher interviews and focus group discussions indicated that student respondents reported spending between one and five hours on TikTok daily.

Some of these students claimed to even spend the whole day on TikTok when it was not a school day.

"I log onto TikTok immediately after school. When it is not a school day, I can spend the whole day on TikTok." (Student 3, FGD B, 12th September 2025)

Responses from teachers supported this data. Many of them mentioned that students usually spend two to three hours on TikTok, which happens immediately after they are released in the evening from school.

"I imagine as soon as we release them around 6 in the evening, chances are when they get home, they get engaged on TikTok and other social media sites. We could talk about three hours every day." (Teacher 10, Interview, 25th September 2025)

"I think in a day the students spend two hours, for those who have smartphones, and not all of them but the majority of them." (Teacher 1, Interview, 16th September 2025)

Most students' best time to visit TikTok was also reported to be evening hours after school, with reasons such as killing boredom, relaxing, and catching up with friends. This revealed why TikTok is popular among young people. It is their platform for passing time and relieving stress and tension. As a result of TikTok being entertaining, students and teachers find it addictive, thus consuming a lot of students' valuable time.

"TikTok is popular among students like us since young people are creating the content on TikTok and we are young so we relate with them." (Student 2, FGD School E, 21st September 2025)

Qualitative data further revealed that due to students spending long hours on TikTok, they transfer a flawed TikTok language to their compositions in school. During interviews, teachers highlighted some of these errors that subconsciously come from internalizing the language they interact with on TikTok.

Teacher 8 from School A said:

"...TikTok compromises grammatical structures and with time, there are those structures that, when they are used over time, they become real, and we use them. When a word on TikTok is used often, we internalize it and think it is correct. And sometimes you get it in your students' work." (Teacher 8, Interview, 19th September 2025)

Some examples of these errors include:

"...instead of writing 'good' like g-o-o-d, the student writes 'gud' with the letters g-u-d" (Teacher 6, Interview, 19th September 2025)

"For example, when writing 'the', they write an e with a dash on top, which is common on TikTok" (Teacher 4, Interview, 17th September 2025)

In the given examples, the data shows non-standard orthography in the writing of the word 'good' and a punctuation mistake in the writing of 'the'.

These findings demonstrated that since TikTok encourages brevity and urgent writing, this characteristic of TikTok language results in the shortening of words so as to use as few letters or words as possible for one to express themselves.

Both the quantitative and qualitative data indicate that student respondents spend long hours on TikTok after school hours. Prolonged hours on TikTok may create a habit of constantly consuming non-standard language on TikTok. Later, they may reproduce what they have consumed by introducing inappropriate vocabulary, phrases, grammatical mistakes, spelling mistakes, wrong sentence structures, code-mixed words and phrases into their English compositions, as teachers demonstrated in this study.

These findings agree with Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory, which outlines mediational processes that cause a change of behaviour in a person (Bandura, 1969). The first mediational process is attention, which in this case requires a student to give time to a particular medium such as TikTok. Attention then leads to retention of what the learner has been exposed to. The learner may retain a vocabulary word or a sentence picked from TikTok. Reproduction is the third stage, where the student uses the vocabulary, and depending on the motivation, which is the last stage, the student may subconsciously make it a habit to use the word.

Krashen's (1992) Input hypothesis also supports these findings. The argument that comprehensible input leads to language acquisition goes in line with the implication that this study holds (Krashen, 1992). Frequent exposure to TikTok language may lead the learner to acquire and use the language they interact with on TikTok. They may acquire expressions, vocabulary, and sentence constructions due to many hours on TikTok.

The results also agree with authors such as Moshi (2019), who have reported that when students spend many hours on TikTok, there is a direct effect on their writing skills. Iqbal (2021) also reported that students who spent many hours on TikTok generally recorded negative impacts in different life aspects as compared to those who spent fewer hours. The findings of this study agree with this sentiment because day secondary school students' writing skills are seen to be generally affected as a result of time dedicated to the TikTok app. Acebes (2024) notes that TikTok has an addictive nature, thus making students waste many hours scrolling on the highly engaging site and watching videos. The study by Acebes (2024) concludes that these prolonged hours cause a deterioration of academic productivity, which includes English composition writing skills.

Other scholars such as Worku (2022) and Esman *et al.* (2021) hold that with parental monitoring and little time spent on TikTok, one's written language may not be affected. However, with the high number of students admitting to spending many hours on TikTok, this is evidence that parental monitoring of learners' TikTok use may not be taking place as ideally as it should in the sub-county. Thus, it suffices to observe that the

prolonged exposure to TikTok among many students in Moiben sub-county frequently exposes them to writing flaws such as slang, wrong spellings, and incorrect grammar that they unknowingly internalize and use, thus affecting their English composition writing skills.

6. Conclusion

The study concludes that day secondary school students are spending an average of one to two hours on TikTok daily. This is usually in the evening hours after they come from school. TikTok is therefore part of these students' daily routine. Spending hours on TikTok has a direct effect on their English composition writing skills. Prolonged hours of exposure to and consumption of TikTok entertainment and socialization videos cause internalization of non-standard language found on TikTok that they later subconsciously reproduce in their compositions. Errors such as inappropriate vocabulary, non-standard orthography, grammatical errors, and wrong sentence structures trickle into their English compositions as a result of long exposure to TikTok.

7. Recommendations

Parents and guardians should ensure keen monitoring of how students access smartphones at home and the amount of time they spend on TikTok watching videos. This will encourage a balance between entertainment on TikTok and time for practicing writing skills taught at school.

Teachers of English should stay up to date with new sites like TikTok and its features. This helps them to be relevant and know what their learners are being exposed to. They will therefore be able to know how to help those students whose writing skills have been affected by the language present on TikTok.

Schools should organize sensitization programs where students can be made aware of TikTok, its moderate use and consumption among them.

The government and the Ministry of Education should ensure that policies are put in place to help regulate how young people, especially those in secondary school, use TikTok.

With the new curriculum (CBE), having digital literacy as one of its core competencies, the Ministry of Education should examine how platforms such as TikTok can be used as a teaching and learning resource in the classroom.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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