

Psychology of Digital Divide among the Poor and the Rich Students in Urban Secondary Schools in Nigeria



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Abstract

This study examined the psychology of the digital divide among poor and affluent students in urban secondary schools in Nigeria. This study employed a quantitative survey method using an online questionnaire administered by Google Forms. This form enables a well-rounded representation, allowing students across the six geopolitical zones to participate in the survey. The online questionnaire was distributed through WhatsApp to enable respondents with adequate knowledge of the subject matter to respond to the questions. The total population of Nigerian students 2021 enrolled in secondary education in Nigeria stood at 13,947,585, according to the World Bank's records. Meanwhile, according to countrymeters. In 2025, Nigeria's population is estimated at 234,497,823. This population figure stood as the actual population of this study and not the population of the students, since the respondents were not limited to students. The sample size for this study stood at 116. This is accepted to be a reliable sample since the respondents had adequate knowledge of the subject of investigation, and also because the respondents cut across the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria. Four objectives were formulated, which were later converted to research questions to properly guide the course of investigation: to find out if students from rich backgrounds have access to digital tools in school than poor students. To identify the kind of digital tools the rich have access to than the poor students. To ascertain the psychological effects of the digital divide amongst students in urban secondary schools. To find out if rich students perform better in terms of academics than poor students. The study finds that the digital divide still exists and is much more prevalent in urban secondary schools in Nigeria, and that the digital divide has psychological effects on students from a poor

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background. The study also concludes that students with more access to digital tools do not necessarily perform better in their academics than those with less access to digital tools. The researchers recommended that the government provide computers and the Internet to urban secondary schools to close the existing digital divide. The researchers also recommended that teachers and parents should monitor the use of digital technology by their students and wards and ensure that they use digital tools for academic purposes.

Keywords: *Psychology, Digital divide, Students, Urban, Secondary Schools, Nigeria*

Introduction

Right from time immemorial, life has been a competition due to class differences. Life has treated some people fairly, while others have not, leaving some in a state of hopelessness and placing them in a second, third, or fourth-class position. This class distinction has been a subject of research for decades. Class struggles, recognition, and dominance have been the subject of economic and political powers. Those in charge of economic and political powers tend to enjoy the good things of life, and their kids and wards are not left out in the enjoyment of the blessings inherited from their parents and caregivers. No doubt, this set of persons in any given society is called the rich, while those who do not have control of politics and also do not have sufficient economic power are called the poor. In other words, the rich are those who have considerable amounts of money and assets in comparison to others. The rich own property and valuables and enjoy a high standard of living, while the poor are individuals who lack sufficient resources, including financial means, to meet their basic needs for a minimum standard of living. This can encompass lacking adequate food, shelter, clothing, and healthcare, among other essentials. Okocha and Edafewotu (2022) see the poor as those individuals who live in poverty and are unable to meet their basic needs of food, clothing, shelter, social and economic obligations, and lack gainful employment skills and assets. These scholars also see the poor as people with low self-esteem. Okocha and Edafewotu also classified the poor as people with limited access to social and economic infrastructure, such as education, health care, potable water, and sanitation, and as a result, have a limited chance of advancing their welfare. Poverty is a multifaceted issue, not solely determined by income, but also influenced by factors like access to education, discrimination, and other socioeconomic disparities. In Nigeria, the poverty gap is wide; the rich are mostly the political class and heavy business moguls, while the top military and career civil servants are in the second tier of the rich in Nigeria, while a vast majority of Nigerians are poor.

Most rich Nigerians are indigenes of one local community or the other but live in the urban cities due to the high concentration of government, socioeconomic, and political activities. The poor in Nigeria are spread across the rural and urban areas. Okocha and Edafewotu (2022), citing Oye(2012), attest to this fact and opined that, although poor individuals may be found in both urban and rural locations, the prevalence of poverty in rural areas is much greater than that found in urban areas. However, there are clear demarcations in their living standards between the poor and the rich Nigerians in the urban areas.

Despite this, there are a few poor kids who find themselves in the same secondary schools as the rich kids in the urban cities. This opportunity may present itself as a result of sheer determination on the part of the parents, scholarship from spirited individuals,

NGOs, multinational companies, government, or religious organizations. In whichever way, the facts remain that rich students are more likely to have access to digital tools than poor students because of the economic advantage and power of their parents, leading to the concept of the have and the have-not and the digital divide. According to Afzal, Khan, Daud, Ahmad, & Butt, (2023), citing (Pearson, 2002; BBC Special Report, 1999; World Telecommunication Development Report, 2002; Bolt & Crawford, 2000), assert that the "digital divide," or the gap between those who have access to and can effectively use technology and those who do not, has been the focus of the vast majority of studies in the contemporary society.

It has been observed today that several young people are digital natives, but there is still fear that a good proportion may be left behind. Nigeria is a third-world country that is beset with poverty and several other developmental issues such as access to technology and the Internet. This study is aimed at understanding the level of the digital divide in secondary schools in urban Nigeria and its psychological implications on the students

Statement of the Problem

The use of technology in the educational sector has become a global competition. Every educational institution wants to showcase how strong it is in terms of the use of ICT. This has trickled down to secondary schools in all countries of the world, including Nigeria. Though research findings still show that many secondary schools in Nigeria do not have enough ICT tools. Findings also show that they lack trained manpower, lack the needed skills on the part of the teachers, forcing many students to take up ICT training in the nearby business centers, where they acquire certificate courses in computer proficiency. Aside from the use of computers, students in secondary schools are also exposed to the use of other digital devices such as smartphones, tablets, iPads, E-books, document cameras, Google Meet, email, the Internet, and social media applications. However, the use of these tools is subject to awareness, availability, and affordability as many secondary schools in Nigeria may not have them. Again, to afford them, income is involved. Students in secondary schools in urban or even rural areas come from different economic backgrounds. In urban areas, it is expected that more families are enlightened and may likely be exposed to digital technologies, but may not have equal economic and financial power to afford them. This is what gives birth to the phenomenon called the digital divide. It is therefore, in light of the above that this study is conducted to find out the psychological effects of the digital divide in urban secondary schools in Nigeria.

Research Objectives

1. To find out if students from rich backgrounds have access to digital tools in school than poor students
2. To identify the kind of digital tools the rich have access to that the poor students
3. To ascertain the psychological effects of the digital divide amongst students in urban secondary schools
4. To find out if rich students perform better in terms of academics than poor students

Literature Review

Digital Technology and Digital Divide

Since the coming of technology, the gap between the rich and the poor has continued to widen. In today's world, the rich carry more sophisticated technological gadgets. Digital

technology refers to the use of electronic devices and systems to create, store, process, and communicate information, often in the form of data. Digital technology comprises software, hardware, internet technologies, and digital platforms, all intended to handle data in a digital format. Digital technologies are classified as hardware, which includes but is not limited to smartphones, tablets, laptops, and servers. Software systems are digital technologies that are not tangible, unlike hardware, that are tangible and can be seen, touched, and even carried about. Software systems include, among others, word processing, spreadsheets, email, media players, Internet browsers, management systems, presentation, pronunciation, translation, and desktop publishing. Internet technologies are among the most recent technologies that shape the way things are done in the present world and create the class. They include the Internet, and social media such as Twitter, now X, WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok. Other digital tools include websites, blogs, and web applications. Digital media and communication tools are parts of digital technology and include, but are not limited to, Social media, email, instant messaging, and video conferencing. This category of digital technology is very common among students in secondary schools (Ngonso et.al, 2018; Ngonso, 2019). The cost of affording these technologies, as well as the need for them, determines who would go for them. For instance, students in secondary school may not need an app for video conferencing, such as the Zoom app or Google Meet app. Even though they may need these technologies, some of them may be exposed to them much more than others because of their parents. This scenario is what is called the digital divide. According to Nwegbu, Osadebe, Ngozi, and Asadu(2011), "the digital divide is a term that emerged in the 21st century due to innovations in information and communication technology. It is used to define inequality in access to and use of telecommunication infrastructure by citizens". At the level of nations, Afzal, *et.al* (2023) assert that the digital divide is "information rich" and "information poor". Digital divide can also be seen as a gap between individuals, families, industries, and ecological areas at different socio-economic levels with regard to their opportunities to access information and communication technology and to their use of the Internet for a variety of purposes. It has also been observed that there are several causes of the global digital divide, such as the per capita income of individuals or wealth differential, and the complex array of economic, political, and socio-cultural matters. Aka, Efenji, and Nwankwo (2025), opined that, despite the promise of ICT, there is still a gap that exists between two sets of individuals in society: first-order barriers (lack of access to hardware, connectivity, or training) and second-order barriers (educators' beliefs and attitudes). Nwegbu, et.al (2011) in their study found that the digital divide is reinforced by the old socioeconomic gap between the rich and the poor, able and disabled individuals and groups within Nigeria.

Education and Technology in Nigeria

Education is believed to be the bedrock of society (Ngonso, 2022) and technology in today's society is the powerhouse of the educational system. The use of technology in education at the lower educational institutions cadre in Nigeria has been a subject of concern and investigation to many academics, researchers, and policymakers. The importance of ICT in the Nigerian secondary has been discussed in several fora, and today, the study of ICT has been enshrined into the secondary school curriculum. According to Owan and Asuquo (2021), at the senior secondary school level, ICT is one

of the compulsory subjects expected of students to offer irrespective of their desired field of interest. These scholars further assert that the introduction of computer studies into the curriculum of secondary education is informed by the revolutionary changes in modern technology across the globe. Thus, making it a sine qua non for its addition to the school curriculum. Every country in the world today tries to catch up with the use of ICT in education, and this has become so an indispensable component that it has gained significant attention among school proprietors, administrators, scholars, and educational policymakers. ICT is used in secondary schools for teaching and learning, administration, examination, security management, information management, result processing, admission processing, fee payment, medicals, and sports. Due to its extensive use in secondary schools, students are compelled to adapt to the new learning environment. As a result of the paucity of ICTs in many secondary schools in Nigeria, students and graduates patronize private computer training centers to acquire basic ICT skills. Again, since most of the certified examinations, such as the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) and tertiary institutions' post-UTME tests are computer-based and the results of such examinations are accessed via the Internet and other digital tools, the need to have access to ICT increased amongst secondary school students. ICT is a driver of high-quality education. According to Ngonso, Egielewa, and Cirella (2024a,p.1600), state that, "the National Policy on Education, revised in 2015, states that teaching in Nigeria should achieve the highest possible standards since no education can surpass the quality of its teachers"

Psychology of Secondary School Students and the Use of ICT

Maisamari *et.al* (2018) see secondary school as the education children receive after primary education and before the tertiary stage, which is meant to prepare the youth for a useful living within society. In the Nigerian educational system presently operating, a child is expected to finish primary school and enroll in secondary school. At present, the educational system in Nigeria is structured as a 6-3-3-4 system. Abdul-Salam (2007) cited in Maisamari *et.al* (2018) describes the secondary school system state that, it is a six-year course and it is in two stages of three years each, called the junior and senior stages of schools respectively. Ngonso *et.al* (2025a) state that at the junior secondary level, students sit for their promotion examinations, usually coordinated by each state of the federation, while the senior secondary takes another three years of the student's study. At this level, the student is exposed to different subjects, including ICT. In the final term of the senior secondary education, students then sit for their certificate examination, which also prepares them to apply for admission into the tertiary institutions. Regrettably, studies conducted by different scholars, as cited by Maisamari *et al*(2018), have shown that most secondary schools have either insufficient or no ICT tools, especially in rural areas. Maisamari, *et.al*(2018) citing the works of (Chattel, 2002; Cheng, 2001; Chiemeke, 2004; Fakeye, 2010) found that in Ibadan, most of the schools do not have computers, and internet connectivity, while the available few were not used for teaching but for administrative purposes. Comparing the findings of other researchers (Okwudishu, 2005; Yusuf, 2005; Adomi & Kpangban, 2010; Ozoji, 2003) as cited by Maisamari, *et. al* (2018) it was found that, 90% of secondary schools have one functional computer out of ten, while some do have the hardware components without the software, many teachers in Nigerian secondary schools are not competent in basic computer operation and in the use of generic software, the unavailability of some ICT

components in schools also hampers teachers' use of ICTs. Lack of adequate search skills and access points in the schools was reported as a force inhibiting the use of the internet by secondary school teachers as well. According to Owan and Asuquo (2021), it has been observed that this generation of secondary school students is often connected to the Internet and social networking sites such as WhatsApp, TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook, but mostly on their devices. Ngonso, in his study conducted in 2019, collaborated with Owan and Asuquo and found that rural teenagers and youth have access to social media through their personal/parents' internet-access mobile phones, though not for academic purposes, but for social engagement. Ngonso also found that rural teenagers prefer Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Twitter, and YouTube to other social networking sites for their daily leisure and entertainment. Similarly, in a study conducted by Ngonso *et.al*, (2025a), it was found that teenagers of school age have access to social media, prefer text, video, and audio kinds of information, and mostly prefer Facebook to other social media networking sites.

Examining the psychology of secondary school students in Nigeria in terms of ICT usage and satisfaction, Owan, and Asuquo (2021) assert that, there are differences in students' satisfaction levels across various groups, ages, genders, parents' income levels, student's education level and school location do not significantly influence students' satisfaction with the study of ICT in secondary schools respectively. Ngonso *et.al* (2025a) averred that social media users, particularly teenagers, are impacted by the communication they engage in. The content (text, audio, video, photo, or graphic) that they experience on social media also shapes their attitudes toward conversation. Ngonso and Egielewa (2018) in their separate study of how social media conversation modified youth behaviour, found that Nigerian youth acquire a new set of alien values which include speech patterns, slang, gossip, rumours, nude pictures, sexual assault, exposure to sexually explicit materials, sexual violence, social interactions, a new way of dressing, and a new worldview. Ngonso *et.al* (2024b) also found that teenagers use social media to stay in touch with their friends, establish professional relationships, express themselves, and fulfill their dreams, but Sharabati (2018) states that Facebook knowledge sharing affected students' academic performance, while Ngonso *et.al* (2018), in their examination of the influence of Twitter on cognitive development of youth found that Twitter influenced the cognitive development of youths, that it improves their thinking capacity but, Kolhar *et al.* (2021) in their work state that the usage of social networking websites and apps has a detrimental impact on social well-being and can cause despair, anxiety, and mood swings, also noted it usage at late night might result in chronic sleep deprivation which could lead to metabolic syndrome.

Methodology

This study employed a quantitative survey method using an online questionnaire administered via Google Forms. This form enables a well-rounded representation, allowing students across the six geopolitical zones to participate in the survey. The online questionnaire was distributed through the WhatsApp social media platform to enable respondents with adequate knowledge of the subject matter to respond to the questions. The total population of Nigerian students in 2021, the total number of pupils enrolled in secondary education in Nigeria stood at **13,947,585**, according to the World Bank's collection of development indicators. Meanwhile, according to countrymeters. In 2025, Nigeria's population is estimated at 234,497,823. This population figure stood as the

actual population of this study and not the population of the students, since the respondents were not limited to students. The sample size for this study stood at 116. This is accepted to be a reliable sample since the respondents had adequate knowledge of the subject of investigation, and also because the number is more than 100.

Data Presentation and Discussion of findings

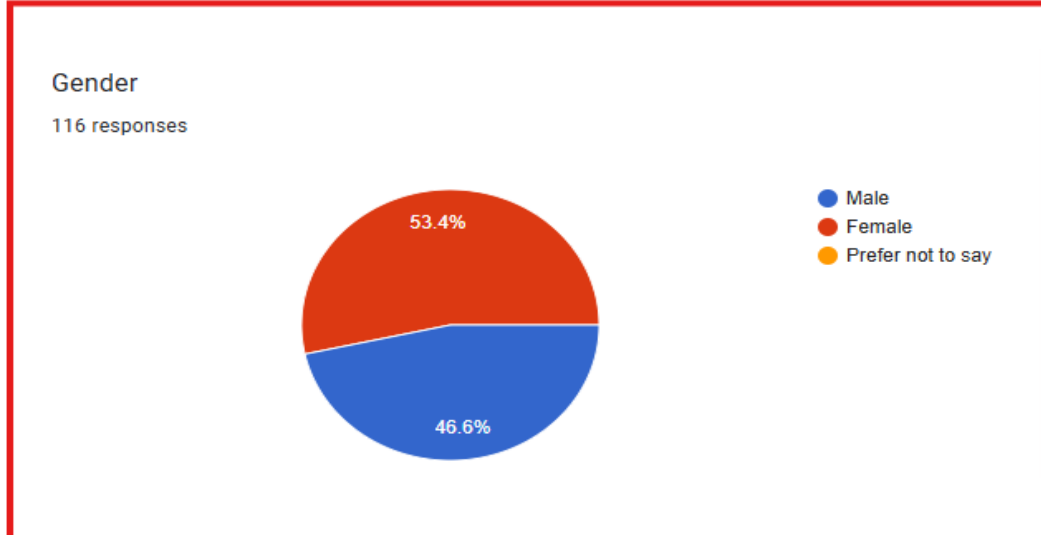


Figure 1 above presents' data on the gender of the respondents who took part in the online survey. The result shows that female participants were 62(53.4%) and male respondents were 54(46.6%), meaning more female respondents were exposed to the online instrument than male.

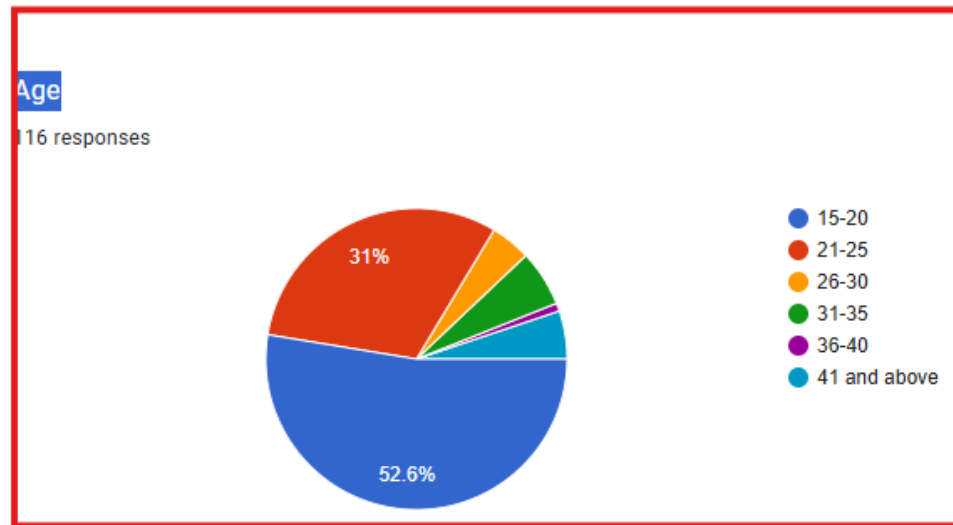


Figure 2 above presents' age distribution of the participated respondents in the online survey. Those within the age bracket of 15-20 were 60(52.6%), respondents within the age group of 21-25 were 36(31%) and those at parental age, 41 and above were 6(5.2%). The

implications of this data is that respondents who are students were actively involved in filling the questionnaire and also the distribution shows a balance distribution since students and parents were all involved in the filling of the questionnaire.

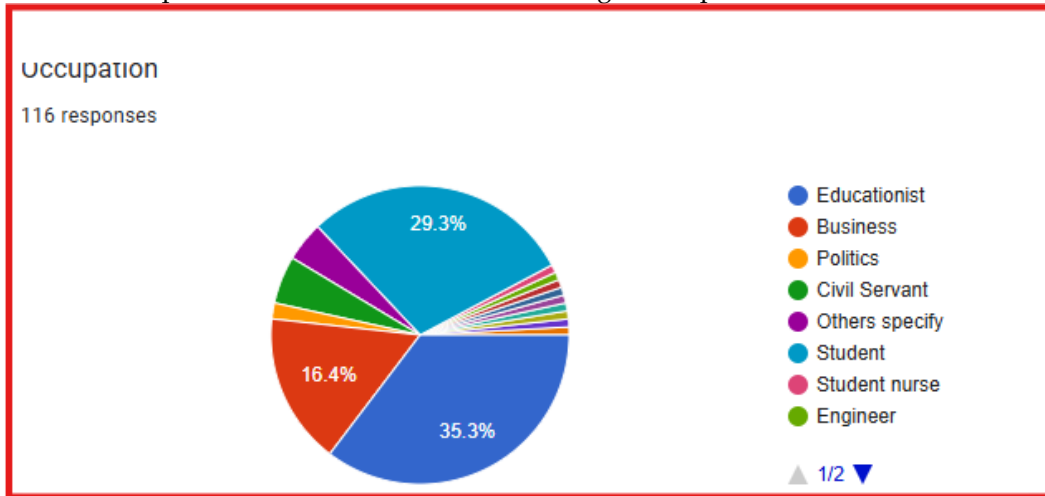


Figure 3 above presents' data on occupation of the respondents. The data showed that educationist were more than other group of the respondents, 41(35.3%). This demonstrate the fact that the result is reliable since the study is about digital divide and its psychological impacts on students in the urban secondary school. The data also showed that 34(29.3%) of the respondents were students and 19(16.4%) were business class. Other occupation also filled the online questionnaire.

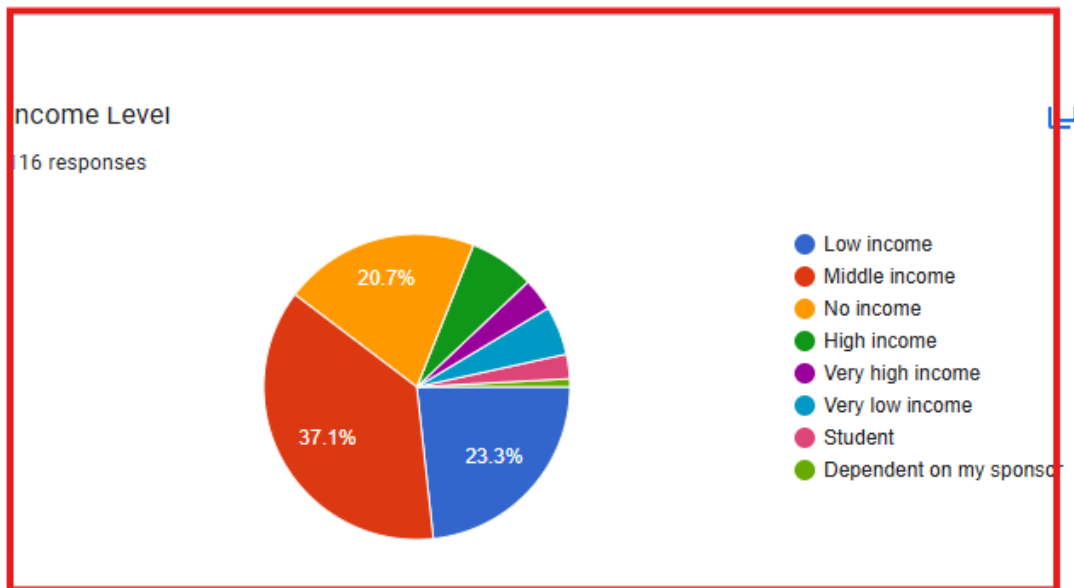
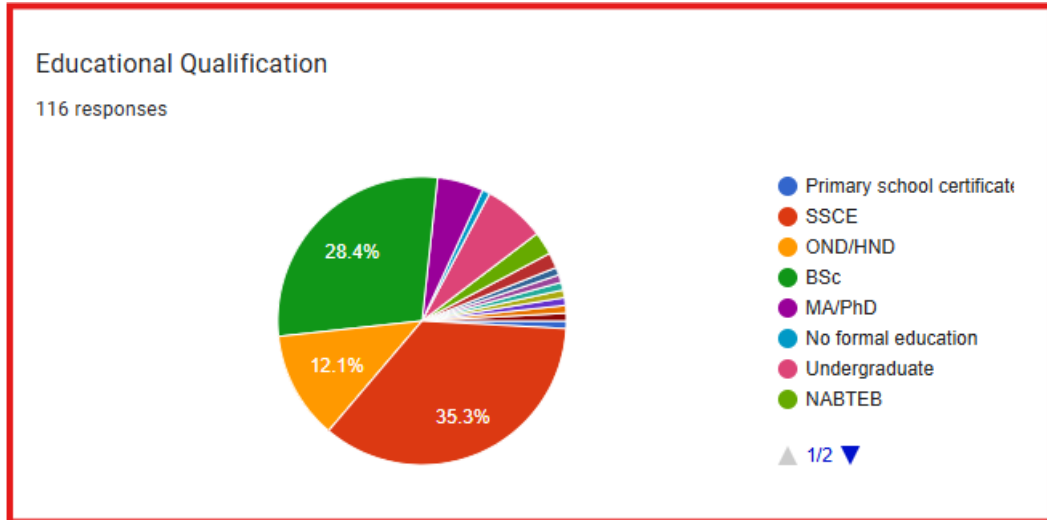


Figure 4 above shows the income level of the respondents. Principally, three sets of respondents were active participants in the online survey. Middle income respondents were 43(37.1%), low income respondents were 27(23.3%) and no income respondents were 24(20.7%). The no income were obviously students who participated in the online survey.



This **figure 5** presents data on educational qualification of respondents. Those who possess BSc were 33(28.4%), OND and HND holders were 14(12.1%) and SSCE were 41(35.5%).

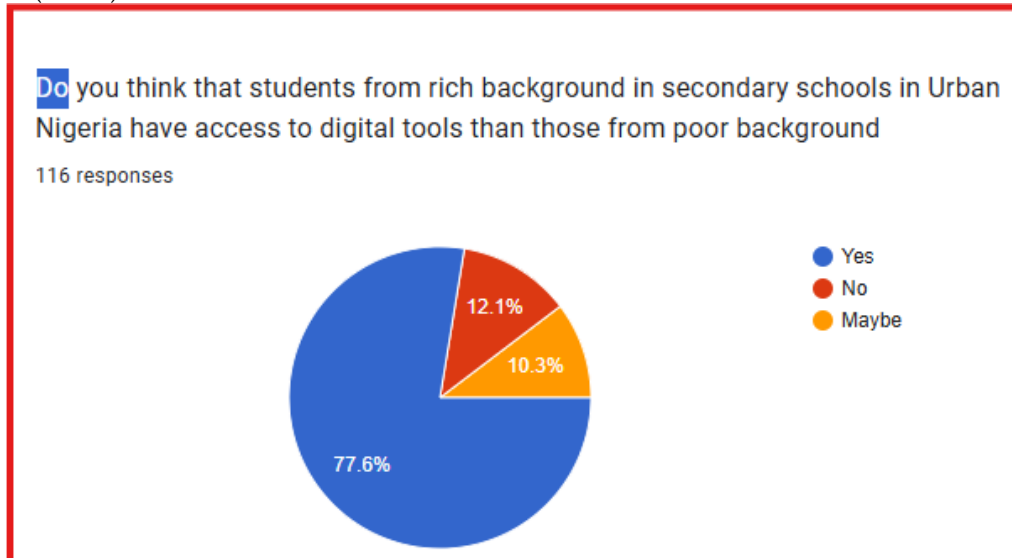


Figure 6 presents data on digital divide. The data showed that digital divide still exist in the urban secondary school in Nigeria. 90 respondents representing 77.6% agreed that digital divide exist in the urban secondary schools while 14 respondents representing 12.1% of the participants said no.

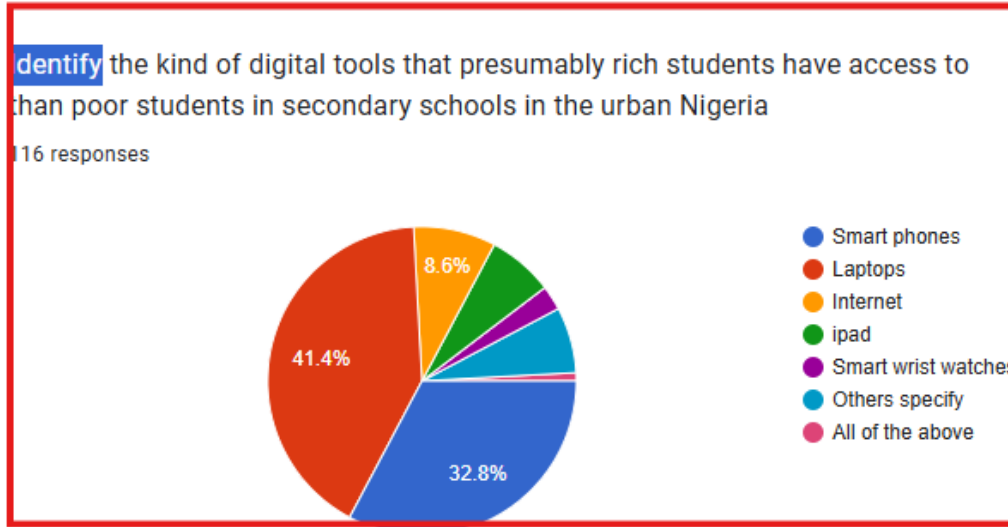
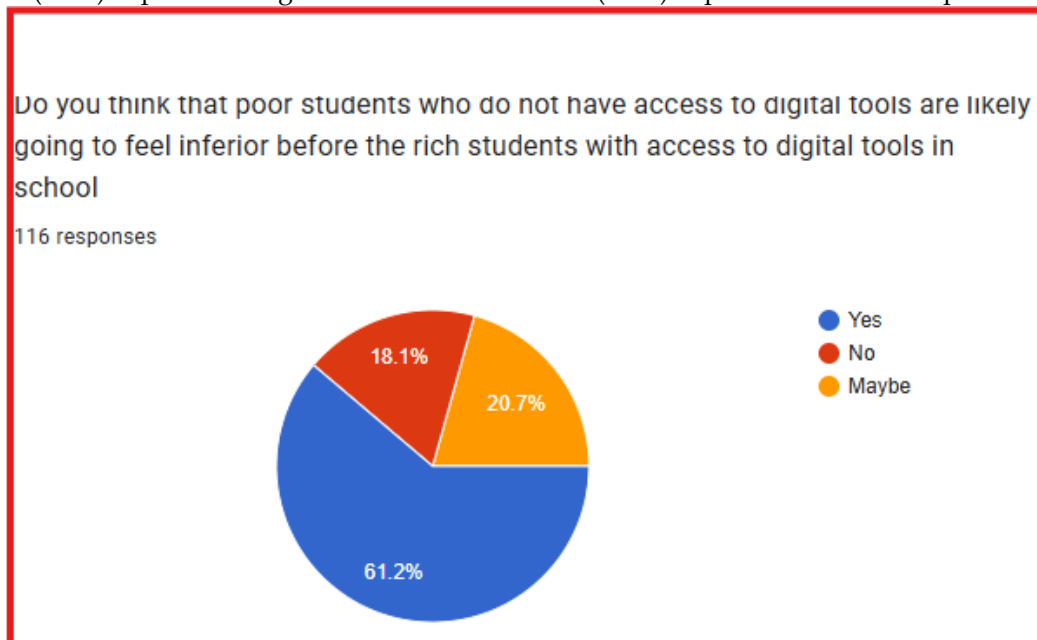


Figure 7 above shows the distribution of the views of the respondents regarding the kind of digital tools that the rich students have access to in the urban secondary school than the poor. The findings showed that rich students have access to laptops than the poor followed by smartphones, followed by access to Internet and ipad. The data showed that 48(41.4%) of the respondents voted for laptop, 38(32.2%) respondents said smartphones, 10(8.6%) respondents' agreed that is Internet and 8(6.9%) respondents voted for ipad.



This **figure 8** above shows the data on the psychological effects of digital divide on the students in secondary school. The data showed that 71 respondents representing 61.2% participants of the online survey believed that digital divide makes the poor students to feel inferior before their mate who are from the rich background. However, 21

respondents who participated in the online survey representing 18.1% of the respondents said no and 24(20.7%) respondents were not sure of the effect.

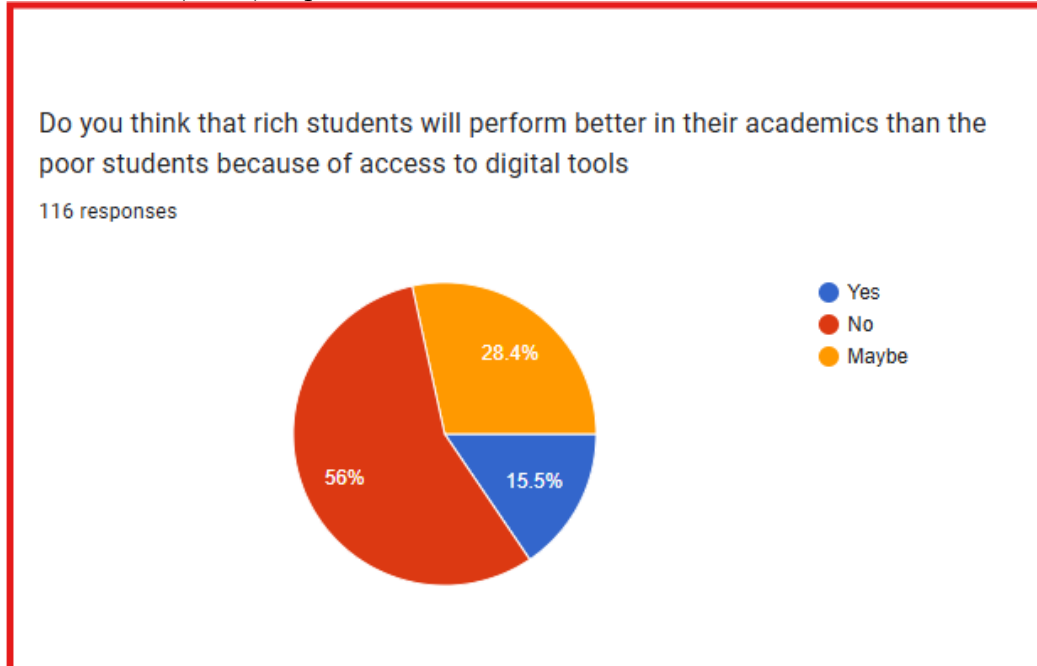


Figure 9 above shows the views of the respondents with regards to the effects of digital tools on the academic performance of students in urban secondary schools. The data showed that digital divide does not give the rich students any academic advantage over the poor students. The data showed that 65 out of 116 respondents representing (56%) said that rich students with more access to digital tools do not perform better academically than poor students, while 18(15.5%) respondents said that, rich students with access to digital tools are bound to do better academically than the poor students. However, 33(28.4%) respondents who participated in the online survey were not sure whether rich students with more access to digital tools are bound to do better than poor students academically. The reason why access to digital tools by students from rich backgrounds in secondary schools in Nigeria may not amount to academic performance may be attributed to usage and accessibility to the Internet. With the Yahoo syndrome, those who have access to a laptop and possibly the Internet may be distracted by Yahoo activity, social media chat, online games, or betting. These are all possibilities. According to Ngonso et.al (2025b), in the last two decades, the Nigerian youth population has grown incredibly with an attendant increase in youth unemployment, likewise the population of Internet users. These factors have also been alleged to have affected the population of youth involved in Internet fraud.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this research were discussed in line with the four research questions earlier posed as objectives, stated thus:

1. Do students from rich backgrounds have access to digital tools in school than poor students?

The research findings showed that children from rich backgrounds in urban secondary schools have access to digital tools than poor students. This finding established the fact that there still exists a digital divide in urban Nigeria. The data from this study showed that the digital divide still exists in urban secondary schools in Nigeria. 90 respondents representing 77.6% agreed that a digital divide exists in urban secondary schools, while 14 respondents representing 12.1% of the participants said no. The findings of this study aligned with those of Aka, Efenji, and Nwankwo (2025), who stated that, despite the promise of ICT, there is still a gap that exists between two sets of individuals in society. Similarly, Nwegbu *et.al* (2011) in their study found that the digital divide is reinforced by the old socioeconomic gap between the rich and the poor, able and disabled individuals and groups within Nigeria.

2. What kinds of digital tools do the rich students have access to digital tools than the poor students?

The findings showed that rich students have access to laptops than the poor, followed by smartphones, followed by access to the Internet, and iPads. The data showed that 48(41.4%) of the respondents voted for laptops, 38(32.2%) respondents said smartphones, 10(8.6%) respondents agreed that it is the Internet, and 8(6.9%) respondents voted for iPads.

3. What are the psychological effects of the digital divide amongst students in urban secondary schools?

The data on the psychological effects of the digital divide on the students in urban secondary schools. The data showed that 71 respondents, representing 61.2% of the online survey, believed that the digital divide makes poor students feel inferior to their mates who are from rich backgrounds. No doubt that the use of laptops, smartphones, and the Internet in secondary schools has become rampant. This would definitely have psychological effects on the students who are unable to access these technological tools. In a similar study conducted by Ngonso *et. al* 2024b, it was found that there is a psychological effect of the use of social media on secondary school students. The psychological effect was the virtual migration of students.

4. Do rich students perform better in academics than poor students as a result of access to digital?

The data showed that the digital divide does not give rich students any academic advantage over poor students. The data showed that 65 out of 116 respondents representing (56%) said that rich students with more access to digital tools do not perform better academically than poor students, while 18(15.5%) respondents said that, rich students with access to digital tools are bound to do better academically than the poor students. However, 33(28.4%) respondents who participated in the online survey were not sure whether rich students with more access to digital tools are bound to do better than poor students academically. The reason why access to digital tools by students from rich backgrounds in secondary schools in Nigeria may not amount to better academic performance may be attributed to usage and accessibility to the Internet. With the Yahoo syndrome, those who have access to a laptop and possibly the Internet may be distracted by Yahoo activity, social media chat, online games, or betting. These are all possibilities. (Ngonso *et.al*, 2025b)

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concludes that the digital divide still exists, much more so in the urban secondary schools in Nigeria, and that the digital divide has psychological effects on students from a poor background. The study also concludes that students with more access to digital tools do not necessarily perform better in their academics than those with less access to digital tools. The researchers recommended that the government provide computers and the Internet to urban secondary schools to close the existing digital divide. The researchers also recommended that teachers and parents should monitor the use of digital technology by their students and wards and ensure that they use digital tools for academic purposes.

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