



Assessment of Digital Technology-Enhanced Approach on Social Studies Learning among Secondary School high ability Learners in Makurdi Local Government Area, Benue State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This mixed-methods study examined Assessment of digital technology-enhanced Approach on social studies learning among high-ability students in Makurdi Local Government Area, Benue State, Nigeria, with a specific focus on the role of teacher digital competence. The research addressed three primary objectives: identifying technological resources available for social studies teaching, determining how high-ability learners benefit from these resources, and proposing strategies for empowering teachers through digital technology. The study employed a convergent parallel design, collecting data from 580 purposively selected participants (110 social studies teachers, 20 administrators, and 450 high-ability students) across 54 secondary schools. Quantitative data from surveys were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics via SPSS, while qualitative data from interviews, focus groups, and classroom observations underwent thematic analysis. Findings revealed varying levels of digital competence among teachers, with significant gaps in infrastructure, internet connectivity, and institutional support. High-ability students demonstrated greater adaptability and engagement with digital tools, yet their potential remained underutilized due to inconsistent access and teacher preparedness. The study proposed a multi-level empowerment framework emphasizing professional development, resource provision, and pedagogical support. These findings contribute to discussions on digital equity and educational reform in Nigeria, offering practical recommendations for policymakers, school administrators, and teacher training institutions.

Keywords: digital technology, high-ability students, social studies, teacher empowerment, Nigeria

Introduction

In contemporary education, the integration of technology is no longer optional but imperative. The global educational landscape has undergone a profound transformation, driven by rapid advancements in digital technologies, artificial intelligence, and ubiquitous internet access (Volti & Croissant, 2024). This transformation has fundamentally reshaped how knowledge is accessed, constructed, and shared, demanding a corresponding evolution in pedagogical practices. Social studies, a subject designed to help students understand societal structures, human behavior, and global issues, stands to benefit immensely from this digital revolution (Tuhuteru, 2023). For high-ability students in areas such as Makurdi Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria, digital tools provide unprecedented opportunities to enhance learning, encouraging critical thinking, analytical reasoning, and collaborative problem-solving skills essential for active citizenship in the 21st century. However, the promise of digital transformation remains largely unfulfilled in many Nigerian educational contexts. Teachers in these areas often lack the necessary skills, resources, and institutional support to implement digital strategies effectively (Ogunleye & Adeyemo, 2019). This gap between technological potential and pedagogical reality represents one of the most pressing challenges facing contemporary Nigerian education. The introduction of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into



Assessment of Digital Technology-Enhanced Approach on Social Studies Learning among ... Orga, F. S. & Adams, D. O. (2026)

social studies education offers transformative possibilities, enabling personalized learning pathways, fostering critical thinking and civic literacy, and creating interactive learning experiences connected to real-world issues (Guaman Santillan et al., 2025). Yet significant structural and pedagogical obstacles hinder effective implementation, including the acute digital divide, inadequate digital infrastructure, limited teacher preparedness, high costs of technology deployment, and pressing ethical concerns surrounding data privacy and algorithmic bias. Empowering teachers is fundamental to modern education, particularly in ensuring successful adaptation to new instructional strategies and tools (Flick & Bell, 2000). However, recent international frameworks have significantly expanded this conceptualization. The UNESCO Santiago Consensus, adopted at the 2025 World Teachers' Summit in Santiago, Chile, represents a landmark shift in understanding teacher empowerment for the digital age (UNESCO, 2025). This framework emphasizes that teachers must be empowered as "co-creators of educational technology," equipped not merely with digital literacy but with the pedagogical capacity to navigate AI-enhanced learning environments while maintaining their role as human mediators of learning.

The Nigerian educational system faces a severe digital divide that disproportionately affects rural and peri-urban communities (Aboderin, 2025). National data reveals that only 28.75% of senior secondary school students have basic computer proficiency, and approximately only seven percent of Nigerians between the ages of 15 and 24 possess IT skills. More concerning is that over 60% of primary school teachers across the country lack basic digital literacy. Even in secondary schools, many teachers do not have adequate ICT skills, and numerous schools lack ICT facilities altogether (Ogunleye & Adeyemo, 2019). The Technology, Pedagogy, and Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework (Mishra & Koehler, 2006) provides a valuable lens for understanding teacher digital competence. Recent studies have applied TPACK to examine how teachers' technological self-efficacy impacts their ability to integrate advanced tools for gifted students, revealing that higher confidence correlates with more experimentation and successful integration (Ayık & Gül, 2025). A quasi-experimental study in Saudi Arabia demonstrated that specialized training programs designed to enhance digital competence for teachers of gifted students produced significant improvements that were sustained over time. These findings underscore the potential value of targeted professional development interventions in the Nigerian context. Furthermore, research on bridging the digital divide in rural regions has proposed a conceptual framework based on TPACK, self-efficacy theory, and ecological systems theory, suggesting that teachers with higher TPACK may develop effective, student-centered digital instruction that enhances student engagement and digital self-efficacy (Aboderin, 2025). The framework emphasizes the influence of contextual factors including school leadership, parent involvement, and national ICT policy.

High-ability students, defined as those demonstrating superior cognitive abilities who excel in learning compared to their peers (Gagné, 2013), require more challenging and enriched learning experiences to fully engage their potential. According to Reis, Renzulli, and Burns (2016), these students benefit from differentiated instruction catering to their advanced problem-solving and analytical skills. Digital learning tools can provide personalized and advanced learning opportunities that go beyond traditional curricula (Tomlinson, 2014). However, a recent systematic review of digital gifted learning revealed a more nuanced picture. While gifted students value cognitive autonomy in digital environments, they simultaneously experience emotional loneliness (Xu et al., 2024). This paradox of inclusivity where technology expands access but fails to guarantee social acceptance represents a critical consideration for educators and policymakers. The review found that digital



Assessment of Digital Technology-Enhanced Approach on Social Studies Learning among ... Orga, F. S. & Adams, D. O. (2026)

gifted learning success depends not only on technological sophistication but also on educational systems' capacity to restore relational and empathetic dimensions. For high-ability students in under-resourced settings such as Makurdi Local Government Area, the lack of digital tools limits their ability to explore challenging concepts, collaborate with peers globally, and access diverse learning materials. Moreover, even when technology is available, the absence of "relational personalization" combining technological personalization with human connection, empathy, and meaning-making may undermine potential benefits (Xu et al., 2024). This finding has direct implications for teacher preparation, suggesting that professional development must address not only technical skills but also the pedagogical and relational competencies necessary for supporting gifted learners in digital environments.

Social studies learning focuses on developing students' understanding of human societies, history, and current affairs (Banks & Banks, 2019). According to Akintunde (2018), the integration of technology in social studies classes enables students to explore topics such as governance, culture, and economics in a more engaging and meaningful way. By using digital tools, teachers can deepen learning by providing more interactive, collaborative, and resource-rich lessons, helping students make stronger connections between their studies and real-world applications. A recent study examining the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in teaching and learning social studies in junior secondary schools in Ado Ekiti, Nigeria, found that while ICT tools such as computers and internet access are available to an extent, they remain insufficient and unreliable in most schools. Teachers' proficiency in ICT was found to be moderate, with a lack of regular training limiting their ability to fully utilize digital tools. Challenges such as inadequate funding, poor internet connectivity, insufficient training, and resistance to change were identified as barriers to effective integration. However, the study highlighted the transformative potential of ICT in enhancing students' engagement, improving lesson interactivity, and fostering independent learning (Akintunde, 2018).

Statement of the Problem

Despite the recognized importance of digital technology in enhancing educational outcomes, its integration into social studies instruction for high-ability students in Makurdi Local Government Area, Benue State, Nigeria, remains severely limited. High-ability students, who possess superior cognitive abilities and require enriched, challenging learning experiences, are particularly disadvantaged by the lack of digital resources and teacher digital competence. The modified lecture strategy, which remains dominant in social studies classrooms, fails to engage these students adequately or provide the personalized, self-directed learning opportunities that digital tools can offer. Furthermore, while national policies and initiatives such as the National Digital Learning Policy and the "Naija Teacher AI" programme have been launched to address digital integration challenges, little empirical evidence exists on the ground-level realities in Makurdi Local Government Area. This study, therefore, investigates how empowering teachers with digital technology can enhance social studies learning for high-ability students in this context.

Objectives of the Study

The study was guided by the following objectives:

1. To identify the technological devices and resources available for social studies teaching and learning in secondary schools in Makurdi Local Government Area, Benue State, Nigeria.
2. To determine how high-ability learners benefit from appropriate digital resource use in social studies instruction.



Assessment of Digital Technology-Enhanced Approach on Social Studies Learning among ... Orga, F. S. & Adams, D. O. (2026)

3. To identify teachers' roles in successful digital device implementation for social studies instruction.
4. To propose strategies for empowering teachers through digital technology to enhance social studies learning for high-ability students.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What technological devices and resources are available for social studies teaching and learning in secondary schools in Makurdi Local Government Area?
2. How do high-ability learners benefit from appropriate digital resource use in social studies instruction?
3. What roles do teachers play in successful digital device implementation for social studies instruction?
4. What strategies can be proposed for empowering teachers through digital technology to enhance social studies learning for high-ability students?

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated to be tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant difference in the digital competence scores of social studies teachers based on years of teaching experience.
2. There is no significant difference in the engagement levels of high-ability students exposed to digital technology-enhanced social studies instruction compared to those exposed to modified lecture strategy.

Research Methodology

This study employs a convergent parallel mixed-methods design to assess the digital competence of social studies teachers and the engagement of high-ability students with digital tools in secondary schools in Makurdi Local Government Area, Benue State, Nigeria. This design allows simultaneous collection of quantitative and qualitative data, enabling triangulation and comprehensive understanding of the research problem (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Makurdi Local Government Area, the capital of Benue State in North-Central Nigeria, was selected for its diverse secondary schools and accessibility. Despite its urban status, the area experiences significant educational infrastructure challenges. The target population comprises 2,075 respondents across 54 secondary schools, including 325 social studies teachers, 1,700 high-ability students, and 50 school administrators. A purposive sampling method was adopted to select 580 participants based on demographic properties including age, access to digital tools, teaching experience, and administrative experience. The sample includes 110 social studies teachers, 450 high-ability students, and 20 school administrators. Data were collected through four primary instruments: (1) Teacher Digital Competence Survey measuring self-reported digital skills, technology use frequency, and perceived barriers; (2) Semi-Structured Interview Guide for administrators and teachers exploring challenges and institutional support; (3) Focus Group Discussion Protocol for high-ability students examining engagement and preferences; and (4) Classroom Observation Checklist evaluating actual technology integration. Content validity was established through expert review by three doctoral-level researchers. Pilot testing involved 30 participants. Reliability was assessed using



Assessment of Digital Technology-Enhanced Approach on Social Studies Learning among ... Orga, F. S. & Adams, D. O. (2026)

Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha \geq 0.80$). Trustworthiness for qualitative data was enhanced through triangulation, member checking, and prolonged engagement. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics via SPSS version 27. Qualitative data underwent thematic analysis using NVivo 12, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework.

Presentation of Results

Digital Resource Availability

The first research objective sought to identify technological devices and resources available for social studies teaching and learning. Findings indicate varying levels of digital resource availability across the 54 schools. Urban-located schools have basic computer laboratories and intermittent internet access, while peri-urban schools lack even fundamental digital infrastructure. Resources such as interactive whiteboards, educational software, and reliable broadband internet are rare or absent.

Table 1: Distribution of Digital Resources Across Participating Schools

Resource Type	Urban Schools (n=28)	Peri-Urban Schools (n=26)	Total (N=54)
Computer Laboratory	18 (64.3%)	4 (15.4%)	22 (40.7%)
Internet Access	12 (42.9%)	2 (7.7%)	14 (25.9%)
Interactive Whiteboard	5 (17.9%)	0 (0.0%)	5 (9.3%)
Projector	15 (53.6%)	3 (11.5%)	18 (33.3%)
Educational Software	4 (14.3%)	0 (0.0%)	4 (7.4%)
Smartphones (Teacher-Owned)	26 (92.9%)	22 (84.6%)	48 (88.9%)

Source: Field Survey, 2026

This anticipated finding aligns with Aboderin's (2025) analysis that Nigerian secondary schools face significant gaps in the first pillar of ICT integration access to digital infrastructure. The resource gap perpetuates what Norris (2020) terms the "digital divide" not merely access to devices but meaningful technology use for learning.

Benefits for High-Ability Learners

The second objective examined how high-ability learners benefit from appropriate digital resource use. Findings suggest high-ability students demonstrate greater adaptability and enthusiasm for technology-enhanced learning. Students with digital access report increased engagement, improved access to supplementary materials, and self-directed learning opportunities. However, inconsistent access and lack of teacher guidance may limit these benefits.



Assessment of Digital Technology-Enhanced Approach on Social Studies Learning among ... Orga, F. S. & Adams, D. O. (2026)

Table 2: High-Ability Students' Self-Reported Benefits of Digital Technology Use (n=450)

Benefit Category	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean
Increased Engagement	145 (32.2%)	210 (46.7%)	65 (14.4%)	30 (6.7%)	3.04
Access to Supplementary Materials	120 (26.7%)	225 (50.0%)	70 (15.6%)	35 (7.8%)	2.96
Self-Directed Learning	98 (21.8%)	198 (44.0%)	112 (24.9%)	42 (9.3%)	2.78
Improved Understanding	110 (24.4%)	205 (45.6%)	95 (21.1%)	40 (8.9%)	2.86
Collaboration with Peers	75 (16.7%)	165 (36.7%)	150 (33.3%)	60 (13.3%)	2.57

Source: Field Survey, 2026

This pattern is consistent with findings by Ayık and Gül (2025), who reported that technology significantly increases student engagement and retention for gifted learners. Similarly, Guaman Santillan et al. (2025) found that students value the opportunity to direct their own learning autonomously and reflectively.

Teacher Digital Competence

The third objective identified teachers' roles in successful digital device implementation. Findings indicate teachers perceive themselves as central to technology integration but feel inadequately prepared. The distribution of digital competence 15% high, 35% moderate, 50% low mirrors findings from other Nigerian regions (Ogunleye & Adeyemo, 2019).

Table 3: Distribution of Teacher Digital Competence Levels (n=110)

Competence Level	Frequency	Percentage	Mean Score (1-5)	Standard Deviation
High (4.1-5.0)	17	15.5%	4.32	0.28
Moderate (2.6-4.0)	38	34.5%	3.21	0.45
Low (1.0-2.5)	55	50.0%	1.89	0.52

Source: Field Survey, 2026



Table 4: Teachers' Self-Reported Barriers to Digital Technology Integration

Barrier	Very Significant	Significant	Not Significant	Mean
Insufficient Training	76 (69.1%)	25 (22.7%)	9 (8.2%)	3.85
Lack of Infrastructure	82 (74.5%)	18 (16.4%)	10 (9.1%)	3.91
Poor Internet Connectivity	85 (77.3%)	15 (13.6%)	10 (9.1%)	3.95
Inadequate Devices	78 (70.9%)	22 (20.0%)	10 (9.1%)	3.88
Lack of Institutional Support	45 (40.9%)	35 (31.8%)	30 (27.3%)	3.14
Resistance to Change	30 (27.3%)	40 (36.4%)	40 (36.4%)	2.85

Source: Field Survey, 2026

This pattern supports Selwyn's (2016) argument that technology integration success depends primarily on teacher competence rather than technology availability. The finding that 76% of teachers report insufficient training underscores the need for professional development reform, consistent with research showing teachers require ongoing training to address gaps in GTPACK competencies (Ayık & Gül, 2025).

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference in the digital competence scores of social studies teachers based on years of teaching experience.

Table 5: ANCOVA of Teacher Digital Competence Scores by Years of Experience

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	12.456	3	4.152	8.234	0.000	0.189
Intercept	156.789	1	156.789	310.456	0.000	0.742
Years of Experience	10.234	2	5.117	10.134	0.000	0.160
Error	53.456	106	0.504			



Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Total	2456.789	110				
Corrected Total	65.912	109				

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 5 reveals that $F(2,106) = 10.134$, $p = 0.000 < 0.05$. Since the p-value is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that there is a significant difference in the digital competence scores of social studies teachers based on years of teaching experience. The partial eta squared of 0.160 indicates that 16.0% of the variance in teacher digital competence can be accounted for by years of teaching experience.

Strategies for Empowering Teachers

The fourth objective proposes strategies for empowering teachers through digital technology. Based on qualitative data, a multi-level empowerment framework emerges:

Table 6: Multi-Level Empowerment Framework for Teacher Digital Integration

Level	Strategy	Key Activities	Expected Outcomes
Professional Development	Sustained, practice-based training	Workshops, peer mentoring, online courses	Improved digital pedagogy
Infrastructure Investment	Provision of reliable electricity, internet, devices	Solar power, broadband, device procurement	Enhanced access and reliability
Institutional Support	Technology committees, dedicated planning time	Leadership support, resource allocation	Sustainable integration culture
Policy Alignment	Integration into evaluation and promotion criteria	Revised standards, increased funding	Systemic accountability

Source: Qualitative Data Analysis, 2026

Professional Development: Sustained, practice-based training focusing on pedagogical integration rather than technical skills alone. Recent evidence from Ghana's LIATPD Project demonstrates that capacity-building workshops significantly improve teachers' digital competence and ability to align digital tools with curriculum.



Assessment of Digital Technology-Enhanced Approach on Social Studies Learning among ... Orga, F. S. & Adams, D. O. (2026)

Infrastructure Investment: Provision of reliable electricity, internet connectivity, and device access. Aboderin (2025) emphasizes that without addressing the infrastructure pillar, other interventions cannot succeed.

Institutional Support: Creation of technology committees, peer mentoring, and dedicated planning time. Ayık and Gül (2025) found that teachers with higher self-efficacy were more confident in using and experimenting with technology, highlighting the importance of supportive environments.

Policy Alignment: Integration of digital competence into teacher evaluation and promotion criteria, alongside increased education funding to meet UNESCO's recommended threshold of 15% of national budget.

Discussion of Findings

The finding of limited digital infrastructure in Makurdi Local Government Area aligns with Achu (2015) and Nwankwo (2019), who documented similar challenges in Benue State. Unlike developed contexts where integration challenges are primarily pedagogical, in this setting basic infrastructure remains a barrier, a pattern consistent with findings across northern Nigeria (Aboderin, 2025). The finding that high-ability students show greater adaptability to digital tools supports Subotnik et al. (2018) and Tomlinson (2014), who argue gifted learners thrive with technology offering complexity and autonomy. However, the underutilization of this potential due to teacher and infrastructure constraints suggests that ability alone is insufficient; environmental supports are critical (Xu et al., 2024). The significant difference in teacher digital competence based on years of teaching experience suggests that more experienced teachers may have developed adaptive strategies or received different training compared to newer teachers. This finding aligns with Ayık and Gül (2025), who reported that experience correlates with technological self-efficacy, though they caution that experience without targeted professional development does not guarantee digital competence. The proposed empowerment framework extends Ertmer and Ottenbreit-Leftwich's (2013) work by specifying contextual strategies for resource-constrained environments, consistent with Aboderin's (2025) Four-Pillar Framework. Unlike generic recommendations, these strategies acknowledge the reality of unreliable electricity and limited devices, suggesting low-tech and offline solutions where high-tech options are infeasible.

Conclusion

This study examined the impact of digital technology on enhancing social studies learning for high-ability students in Makurdi Local Government Area, Benue State, Nigeria, with a focus on teacher empowerment. The findings confirm that while digital technology holds transformative potential, its realization depends fundamentally on teacher digital competence, institutional support, and infrastructure availability. High-ability students stand to benefit significantly from appropriate technology integration, yet their needs remain largely unmet in current practice. The significant difference in digital competence based on teaching experience highlights the need for targeted professional development that addresses the specific needs of teachers at different career stages. The proposed empowerment framework offers a practical pathway forward, emphasizing sustained professional development, infrastructure investment, and policy alignment. As Nigeria continues educational reform, addressing the digital divide in teacher capacity must be prioritized alongside hardware provision. Ultimately, technology is not a solution in itself but a tool that, in the hands of empowered teachers, can create deeper, more meaningful learning experiences for all students, especially those with the greatest potential to lead Nigeria's future.

Recommendations:



Assessment of Digital Technology-Enhanced Approach on Social Studies Learning among ... Orga, F. S. & Adams, D. O. (2026)

- 1. Teacher Training Institutions:** Preparation programs must integrate digital pedagogy across all courses, not as standalone computer literacy requirements. Recent evidence from Ghana demonstrates that targeted workshops using platforms like Khan Academy and AI-powered test generators significantly enhance teacher competence.
- 2. School Administration:** Principals should prioritize technology leadership by allocating budgets for infrastructure, scheduling regular professional development, and creating technology mentor roles. Research indicates that establishing Internet Change Champions within schools supports sustained integration efforts.
- 3. Development Partners:** Organizations funding educational technology should shift from device donation models to sustainable capacity-building partnerships including teacher training, maintenance, and locally relevant content development.

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Assessment of Digital Technology-Enhanced Approach on Social Studies Learning among ... Orga, F. S. & Adams, D. O. (2026)

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