



Social Media Influence on Learning Effectiveness among High School Students: A Case of a Public High School in Ubungo Municipal Council, Tanzania

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Abstract : This study examined the influence of social media particularly Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok on learning effectiveness among high school students in one selected public school in Ubungo Municipal Council Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. Guided by Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977), the research explored students' patterns of social media use, its influence on classroom participation, and perceptions of academic performance. A qualitative case study design and qualitative research approach was employed involving 40 participants: 30 students, 8 teachers, and 2 administrators. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, and analyzed thematically to develop meaning. Findings discovered that TikTok was the most main platform among students primarily used for entertainment and social connection rather than academic engagement. Teachers reported significant challenges including students' fatigue, postponement, incomplete assignments, and declining classroom participation factors attributed to late-night social media use. While a few students acknowledged using WhatsApp and Facebook for academic discussions, the devastating use for entertainment demonstrated that social media often functions as a distraction rather than a learning aid. The study concludes that social media is a double-edged tool beneficial when used purposefully under structured guidance but detrimental when unregulated. It recommends integrating digital literacy education into secondary school curricula, strengthening parent-school monitoring partnerships, and encouraging teacher-facilitated academic social media groups to promote responsible use and model positive digital behavior.

Keyword : Social media, learning effectiveness, high school students, Ubungo Municipal, digital literacy, Social Learning Theory

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INTRODUCTION

The advent of social media has transformed how students communicate, access knowledge, and engage in learning. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok have become central in the lives of young people, enabling new forms of information sharing and collaborative learning while simultaneously fostering distractions that can compromise academic discipline (Chen & Yan, 2023). Globally, studies demonstrate that social media can play a constructive role in enhancing engagement and access to learning materials, particularly when aligned with structured academic objectives (Martinez et al., 2022). However, excessive or unregulated use often results in diminished concentration, postponement, and reduced learning effectiveness (Ahmed, 2023).

In Tanzania, the rapid increase in mobile internet access and smartphone ownership has amplified social media usage among secondary school students (Mutarubukwa & Mazana, 2020). While these platforms offer opportunities for students to interact academically, share resources, and engage in discussions, the majority of students use them primarily for entertainment, which has led to growing concern among educators and parents (Mugambo & Kiwango, 2024). The Education and Training Policy (2014) emphasizes ICT integration in schools but fails to address the responsible use of social media, creating a regulatory gap that allows misuse to proliferate. Consequently, many students spend substantial time on social media platforms for non-academic activities, affecting their time management and academic focus.

Despite the positive potential of social media as a learning tool, its

unregulated use has generated adverse consequences for students' academic engagement, particularly in urban areas such as Ubungu Municipal. Students increasingly dedicate extended hours to entertainment-driven social media interactions at the expense of studying, class participation, and homework completion (Nkolimwa, 2022). This behavior has resulted in fatigue, distraction, and reduced motivation for academic work. While government initiatives have promoted ICT in education, limited emphasis has been placed on social media's pedagogical integration and control mechanisms (URT, 2014). Moreover, most prior research in Tanzania has focused on tertiary education (Mutarubukwa & Mazana, 2020), leaving a significant knowledge gap regarding how social media influences secondary school students' learning effectiveness. This study therefore sought to fill that gap by investigating how social media usage affects learning participation and effectiveness among high school students in Ubungu Municipal, Dar es Salaam. The research Objectives guiding the study are; To explore how high school students use social media in a selected public school in Ubungu Municipality, and to examine how the use of social media influences students' participation in learning activities in the selected school.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Review

The study was grounded in Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977), which posits that individuals acquire new behaviors, attitudes, and skills through observing and modeling others' actions. Bandura emphasized that learning occurs within social contexts through observation,

imitation, and reinforcement, meaning that students are more likely to replicate behaviors that are socially rewarded. In the context of social media, platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook create rich environments for observational learning, where students continuously encounter diverse behaviors modeled by peers and influencers (Timung et al., 2024). These online interactions may positively influence students' academic engagement when the observed behaviors are constructive for example, following educational influencers or participating in academic discussions. However, when entertainment-based content receives greater social reinforcement through likes, comments, and trends, students are more likely to emulate unproductive habits that undermine learning (Hu et al., 2024).

The theory also integrates the concept of self-efficacy, which refers to an individual's belief in their capacity to perform tasks successfully. Social media interactions can either strengthen or diminish students' self-efficacy depending on the nature of feedback received. Positive recognition of academic efforts online can enhance motivation, whereas cyberbullying or negative comparison may erode self-esteem and academic confidence (Zulfiqar et al., 2022). Thus, Bandura's framework is instrumental in explaining how the digital environment functions as both a platform for learning and a source of behavioral influence that affects students' academic performance.

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Social Media Usage Among High School Students

Corzine and Harrison (2023) conducted a quantitative survey in the United States, targeting 1,200 high school

students. The study employed random sampling and online questionnaires to assess the frequency and purposes of social media usage. Findings revealed that 89% of teenagers actively use at least one social media platform, with Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok being the most popular. The study concluded that while social media facilitates learning, it also leads to divided attention, procrastination, and reduced study time. The researchers recommended structured policies to regulate student engagement with Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok during study hours. Similarly, Kokoç (2021) carried out a descriptive correlational study in Turkey, examining high school students' social media habits and academic engagement. The study involved 800 students, using systematic random sampling and online surveys. Findings showed that students who frequently multitasked with Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok during study sessions had lower academic performance than those who used social media in a structured manner. The study recommended awareness programs on digital distractions and responsible social media use in schools.

In a related study, Chan and Leung (2022) conducted a large-scale survey in Hong Kong, a developed region with high digital penetration, to explore social media usage patterns among secondary school students. The study surveyed 1,000 students using stratified random sampling and found that 92% accessed platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube daily. Although some students used these platforms for academic purposes such as tutorials and study groups, the majority reported difficulties in maintaining focus and managing time effectively due to constant social media engagement.

Likewise, Smith and Parker (2021) carried out a longitudinal study in the United Kingdom involving 850 high school students. The research showed that students who frequently used social media during homework time had significantly lower academic scores over time compared to their peers who limited their use. The study concluded that while social media offers learning support, its unstructured use undermines academic achievement, calling for school-based awareness campaigns and digital discipline strategies.

In Africa, especially in Nigeria, Tayo et al. (2019) conducted a mixed-method study focusing on high school students' Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok usage and its impact on academic engagement. The study sampled 600 students using purposive sampling and collected data through structured questionnaires and focus group discussions. The findings indicated that students spent an average of 4–6 hours daily on social media, with the majority engaging in non-educational activities. The study recommended school-based social media awareness programs and the integration of digital literacy into the curriculum. In South Africa, Mphahlele et al. (2021) conducted a longitudinal study on the impact of digital access on student engagement with Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok for learning. The study sampled 750 high school students from both urban and rural schools using stratified random sampling and collected data through surveys and digital engagement tracking tools. Results indicated that students in well-connected urban areas benefited from educational use of social media, while those in low-connectivity areas primarily used Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok for

entertainment. The study emphasized the need for equitable internet access and structured guidelines for social media use in education.

In East Africa, Ezenwa et al. (2022) conducted a descriptive cross-sectional study in Kenyan secondary schools to analyze students' social media habits and academic performance. A total of 450 students and 50 teachers were selected through stratified random sampling, and data were collected using surveys and key informant interviews. The study found that 70% of students used social media primarily for entertainment, while only 30% engaged in academic discussions. Teachers reported that excessive social media use resulted in reduced class participation and lower academic scores. The study recommended that educators and parents work together to promote responsible social media use. Similarly, Goet (2022) conducted a case study in Uganda, investigating how social media engagement affects high school students' study habits. Using qualitative interviews and focus groups, the study sampled 300 students and 20 teachers. Findings revealed that students who spent more than three hours daily on social media had declining academic performance, while those who limited their usage to educational content showed improved engagement. The study recommended that schools introduce digital discipline policies to balance social media usage.

In Tanzania, Mugambo and Kiwango (2024) carried out a case study in Moshi urban secondary schools, examining the relationship between social media and academic engagement. Using qualitative interviews and document analysis, the researchers sampled 200 students and 20 teachers from five schools. The study

found that unregulated social media use negatively affected students' academic performance and class participation. It is recommended that schools implement structured guidelines on social media use and that parents actively monitor students' online activities. Similarly, Nkolimwa (2022) conducted a survey-based study on social media usage and academic performance among high school students in Dar es Salaam. The study sampled 500 students across 10 schools, using self-administered questionnaires. Findings showed that students who used social media for more than four hours a day performed worse academically compared to those who used it for educational purposes. The study recommended the introduction of social media awareness programs in secondary schools to educate students on time management and academic discipline.

Social Media Influences on Students' Participation in Learning Activities

Kokoç (2021) conducted a quantitative correlational study in Turkey, examining the relationship between multitasking with social media and academic performance. A sample of 800 high school students was selected using systematic random sampling, and data were collected through structured questionnaires and academic performance records. The findings revealed a negative correlation (-0.45) between excessive social media use and GPA scores, suggesting that students who frequently multitasked with social media performed worse academically. The study recommended setting designated study hours with restricted access to social media to improve concentration and academic outcomes. Similarly, Hu et al. (2024) carried out an

experimental study in China to analyze the impact of social media-assisted learning on students' academic performance. The study involved 600 students, divided into two groups (experimental and control groups). The experimental group used social media-based learning platforms, while the control group followed traditional learning methods. Findings indicated that students in the experimental group performed better in collaborative assignments, but those who used social media excessively for non-academic purposes exhibited lower test scores. The study recommended educational training on structured social media use to enhance its positive effects on learning.

In Africa, Bhandarkar et al. (2021) conducted a longitudinal study in South Africa with 1,000 secondary school students, using surveys, academic records, and in-depth interviews. The study found that students spending more than three hours daily on social media had lower academic achievements compared to those who used Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok for less than an hour. The researchers emphasized the need for school-wide interventions promoting responsible digital habits. Okoampa-Larbi et al. (2021) carried out a cross-sectional survey in Ghana on the impact of social media on private university students' academic performance. The study sampled 700 students, using questionnaires and focus groups to assess students' academic habits. Results indicated that students who used social media for educational purposes experienced slight academic improvement, while those who engaged in non-academic activities on social media had lower grades. The study recommended that educators integrate social media tools into structured

learning activities to maximize their benefits.

In East Africa, Goet (2022) conducted a descriptive case study in Kenya, analyzing the relationship between social media usage and student performance in high schools. A total of 500 students and 40 teachers participated, with data collected through questionnaires and academic records. The study found that students who frequently checked social media during study time had lower academic performance, while those who used social media for academic discussions showed slight improvements. The study recommended that schools establish policies to monitor and regulate student social media use. Similarly, Wambua et al. (2022) conducted a mixed-method study in Uganda, investigating how social media usage affects students' focus and academic discipline. The study used stratified random sampling to select 400 students from six schools, collecting data through interviews, surveys, and classroom observations. Findings indicated that high social media engagement during study hours led to increased academic procrastination and reduced comprehension levels. The researchers suggested introducing time management training for students to help them balance social media use and academic work.

In Tanzania,) adopted a mixed-method approach to investigate how social media affects secondary school students' academic focus. Data was collected from 350 students and 50 teachers through questionnaires, focus groups, and classroom observations. Results indicated that students who frequently engaged with social media during study time reported lower test scores and reduced attention spans. The study recommended

integrating digital discipline into school curricula. Additionally, Mugambo and Kiwango (2024) conducted a case study on secondary school students in Dar es Salaam, assessing the impact of unregulated social media usage on academic outcomes. The study sampled 250 students from five urban schools, using semi-structured interviews and document analysis. Findings revealed that students who spent over five hours daily on social media had significantly lower academic performance than their peers. The study recommended that schools implement digital literacy programs and parental monitoring strategies to mitigate academic decline due to excessive social media use.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research approach and a qualitative case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of how social media influences learning effectiveness among high school students in Ubungo Municipal. The design was appropriate for exploring participants' experiences in their natural school context (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A total of 40 participants were involved, comprising 30 Form Five and Six students, 8 teachers, and 2 administrators. Criterion sampling was used to select students who were active daily users of Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok, while purposive sampling identified teachers and administrators with direct experience supervising students' learning.

Data were collected using semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs). All sessions were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Data analysis followed the thematic analysis approach, involving coding, categorization, and interpretation to

identify emerging patterns and meanings. To ensure trustworthiness, the study applied Lincoln and Guba's (1985) framework for credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Ethical considerations such as informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation were strictly observed throughout the research process.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The study explored how social media influences learning effectiveness among high school students in Ubungu Municipal Council. Data from interviews and focus group discussions were analyzed thematically based on the two objectives of the study. The main findings revealed that while students acknowledged the importance of social media for accessing information, most used it primarily for entertainment and social interaction. Teachers and administrators expressed concern that unregulated social media use had become a significant distraction, negatively affecting classroom participation, assignment completion, and overall academic discipline.

The Use of Social Media Platforms by High School Students

The findings revealed that high school students in Ubungu Municipal Council extensively use social media platforms, with TikTok, WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube being the most preferred. Although students claimed they occasionally use these platforms for academic purposes, teachers and administrators noted that entertainment-driven content dominates. A teacher observed:

"Most of our students are highly active on Instagram and TikTok daily. When you ask them, they often insist that it helps them with learning by watching short videos, but when you look carefully at the type of content, the reality is that they are mostly watching music clips, funny skits, or following dance trends" (Interviewee T, July 2025).

Similarly, a student admitted:

"For many of us, the choice of which social media platform to use depends heavily on what our friends are using. TikTok is always full of new trends, funny clips, and videos we want to talk about the next day in school" (FGD S, July 2025).

This demonstrates that peer influence and platform design strongly drive usage patterns, consistent with Montag et al. (2021), who note that algorithms encourage prolonged engagement. Bandura's Social Learning Theory explains that adolescents imitate behaviors rewarded online, such as likes and comments, reinforcing entertainment-driven rather than academic engagement. TikTok's endless scrolling and viral content, highlighted by a head teacher

"students can easily lose track of time and end up spending the entire evening consuming short, entertaining content instead of doing assignments" (Interviewee HT, July 2025)

Illustrates the challenges of self-regulation and the global trend of algorithm-driven adolescent behavior (O'Reilly et al., 2022).

Despite heavy entertainment use, students reported meaningful academic

engagement on social media. WhatsApp, YouTube, Facebook groups, and TikTok learning channels were used to share study materials, discuss assignments, and access educational tutorials. One student shared:

“Most of us use social media platforms for academic purposes, as it helps us to get different material about our subjects. We have different online groups that help us to share the information” (FGD S, July 2025).

Teachers, however, expressed concerns about distractions:

“Students are constantly chatting online, even during class hours. While it helps them connect, it can also distract them from real-time interaction and discipline” (Interviewee T, July 2025).

The findings suggest that social media can support collaborative and self-directed learning, echoing Siemens and Tittenberger (2020) and Mmbaga et al. (2022), yet the lack of boundaries requires interventions in digital literacy and time management. Students also use social media for information updates, with one student noting:

“I follow some pages that post news, like on Instagram or Twitter. Sometimes I know about something before it’s on TV” (FGD S, July 2025). Teachers emphasized the need for fact-checking skills: “Not everything they see online is true or accurate. It’s easy to get misled by fake news or biased posts” (Interviewee T, July 2025).

These findings align with Agha and Hashmi (2024) and Ohara (2023), highlighting the dual role of social media

as both a learning tool and a source of potential misinformation.

Social media was also used for self-expression, creativity, and socio-emotional support. Students described online platforms as spaces to express identity, connect with peers, and develop skills. One student explained:

“I post poems and art on my Instagram. It’s where I can be myself without judgment. Sometimes people message me saying they relate to it, which makes me feel understood. It’s my little space to be creative and honest” (FGD S, July 2025).

Teachers acknowledged the value of these digital outlets, particularly for quieter students:

“I think some students who are quiet in class are very expressive online they seem more comfortable writing out their thoughts than speaking in front of the class” (Interviewee T, July 2025).

However, excessive night-time entertainment use raised concerns:

“It becomes a problem when students stay up late watching videos and come to school tired and inattentive. They struggle to focus in class and miss out on important lessons” (Interviewee T, July 2025).

These findings indicate that social media provides opportunities for creativity, emotional expression, and skill acquisition, in line with Bandura’s Social Learning Theory, where learners acquire knowledge and behaviors through observation and reinforcement. At the same time, the risks of distraction, sleep deprivation, and reduced academic

performance emphasize the need for guided digital engagement and structured media literacy programs (Veletsianos, 2021; Ndubuaku et al., 2020).

The Influence of Social Media Usage on Students' Participation in Learning Activities

The study revealed that social media enhances students' access to educational content, particularly in schools with limited physical resources. Students reported using platforms such as YouTube, WhatsApp, and Telegram to access past papers, tutorials, and topic explanations aligned with the Tanzanian syllabus. One student explained,

"At our school, we sometimes have to share one textbook among four or five students but on Telegram, I have downloaded almost all past papers from 2019 to now. It really helps me practice at home, especially before exams" (FGD S, July 2025).

Teachers confirmed that students came to class better prepared, with one noting,

"Students are more proactive now... which saves time and makes discussions deeper" (Interviewee T, July 2025).

These findings align with Mugambo and Kiwango (2024), who found that Tanzanian urban students using social media for academic purposes performed better than peers who used it mainly for entertainment. Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977) explains that students learn by observing and modeling behaviors. Observing peers and online educators engage productively reinforces similar academic behaviors, promoting self-

directed learning and academic self-efficacy.

Social media also fosters peer academic support and collaborative learning. WhatsApp and Telegram groups allowed students to discuss difficult topics, clarify assignments, and receive guidance from peers and alumni. One student remarked,

"Our teachers are helpful, but they can't always be available. In the group, we help each other in real-time. Even during holidays or weekends, we are still connected and revising together" (FGD S, July 2025).

Teachers noted,

"Learning continues online. Students ask questions and share answers even after school hours. It shows that they are serious and responsible for their own progress" (Interviewee T, July 2025).

This supports Corzine and Harrison (2023), who argued that online collaboration strengthens engagement and problem-solving skills. Bandura's theory explains this as vicarious learning: students observe and imitate effective study habits from peers while receiving social reinforcement, which motivates active participation and strengthens collaborative learning.

Finally, social media enhances language skills, motivation, and inter-school collaboration. Students reported improved English through peer feedback:

"I write posts in English in our WhatsApp group I feel I am improving my grammar without even trying" (Interview, July 2025).

Teachers also observed that shy students participated more in digital spaces, and the head teacher noted,

"When students read blogs or watch YouTube videos in English, they pick up idioms and expressions we don't always cover in class" (Interviewee HT, July 2025).

Students engaged in cross-school groups, with one stating,

"Our physics WhatsApp group includes students from three different high schools I feel like I have learned more from this group than I sometimes do in regular class" (FGD, July 2025).

These outcomes align with Hu et al. (2024), who found that social media-assisted learning improves engagement and self-efficacy. Bandura's theory links these outcomes to modeling and reinforcement: students imitate successful behaviors, receive validation, and internalize effective strategies. Consequently, social media promotes motivation, collaboration, and inclusivity while supporting observational learning and self-directed academic growth.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

The study concludes that social media significantly influences the learning experiences and academic engagement of high school students in Ubungu Municipal. Regarding the first objective, findings revealed that social media enhances access to educational content, peer academic support, self-directed learning, language development, motivation, and inter-school collaboration. Students utilized platforms

such as YouTube, WhatsApp, Telegram, and TikTok to access tutorials, past papers, and discussion forums, which supplemented limited school resources and promoted proactive learning. Teachers and school leaders confirmed that students who engaged with educational content online were better prepared for lessons, more confident, and more actively involved in classroom discussions. These findings align with Bandura's Social Learning Theory, as students modeled behaviors observed in peers and online educators, leading to reinforcement of productive learning habits and greater academic self-efficacy.

For the second objective, the study demonstrated that social media encourages active participation in learning activities by facilitating collaborative engagement, peer mentorship, and continuous interaction beyond school hours. Students reported using online groups to clarify difficult topics, discuss assignments, and exchange study resources across schools, which fostered teamwork, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills. Furthermore, exposure to educational content in Kiswahili and English improved comprehension, communication skills, and confidence in expressing ideas. While social media offers these benefits, the study also highlighted potential risks: excessive use for entertainment can undermine focus, promote procrastination, and reduce classroom discipline. This duality underscores the need for structured guidance and policies that maximize academic benefits while mitigating distractions.

Taken together, the findings of both objectives imply that social media is a powerful tool for learning enhancement,

particularly in resource-constrained contexts where access to textbooks and formal learning materials is limited. The study suggests that schools should integrate social media strategically into teaching and learning, promote digital literacy, and guide students in responsible usage. Teachers are encouraged to leverage online resources to complement classroom instruction, support self-directed learning, and facilitate collaborative knowledge sharing. At a policy level, educational stakeholders should recognize the dual nature of social media its capacity to boost academic participation and achievement versus its potential to distract and implement frameworks that ensure it is harnessed constructively. Ultimately, these findings highlight the importance of combining technology, pedagogy, and guidance to foster active, motivated, and self-reliant learners in Tanzanian secondary schools.

Recommendations

The study recommends that the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training develop clear national guidelines and school-level policies to govern the responsible use of social media among students. Such policies should define acceptable usage times, promote the integration of educational platforms, and limit access to entertainment content during learning hours. This framework would enable schools, teachers, and parents to guide students toward productive online engagement while minimizing distractions.

It is also essential to incorporate digital literacy education into the secondary school curriculum, equipping students with skills to critically evaluate online content, manage their time

effectively, and utilize social media for research, peer learning, and responsible communication. Teacher training should support the integration of digital literacy across subjects, ensuring that students recognize social media as a resource for learning rather than solely a source of entertainment. In addition, teachers should actively create and manage supervised online academic spaces, such as WhatsApp or Facebook groups, where students can engage in constructive discussions, access learning materials, and participate in guided research activities. By modeling positive digital behavior, educators reinforce productive online practices consistent with Social Learning Theory.

Collaboration between parents and school administrators is equally important. Regular communication through meetings and awareness programs can help monitor students' social media habits, address potential distractions, and ensure that online activities are purposeful and academically focused. Finally, future research should explore differences between urban and rural schools, assess the long-term effects of social media on learning, and evaluate interventions such as digital literacy programs. Such studies would provide evidence-based insights to guide policymakers and practitioners in promoting responsible and effective digital engagement among students.

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