

Bridging the Digital Divide: Evaluating AI Research Tool Adoption among Nigerian University Students

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Abstract:

This study evaluated the effectiveness of Artificial Intelligence (A.I) as a research tool among Nigerian university students. With the increasing integration of A.I technologies into academic settings, understanding how students engaged with and benefited from these tools was essential. A quantitative research design was employed, and data were collected through the distribution of 359 structured questionnaires across various faculties within the university. The study assessed students' awareness, frequency of use, perceived benefits, challenges, and overall effectiveness of A.I tools, such as ChatGPT, Grammarly, and research-based algorithms, in enhancing research productivity, critical thinking, and academic writing. Findings revealed that a significant proportion of students utilized A.I tools regularly, primarily for information sourcing, writing assistance, and data analysis. While students acknowledged the efficiency and time-saving benefits of A.I, they also raised concerns regarding accuracy, dependency, and ethical use. The results indicated that A.I played a supportive role in students' research activities, but its effectiveness was influenced by factors such as digital literacy, access, and user intent. The study concluded with recommendations for integrating A.I literacy into university curricula and promoting responsible use to maximize its potential as a research enhancer.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Research Tools, Students, Nigerian University Students, AI Effectiveness.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18147043>

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1. INTRODUCTION

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is transforming the educational landscape, offering promising tools that enhance the accuracy, efficiency, and personalization of teaching, learning, and assessment. AI technologies, particularly in educational assessment, support activities such as test development, scoring, feedback generation, and performance analysis (Naqvi, 2020; Wardat et al., 2023). Large language models like ChatGPT are increasingly used to automate assessments, assist in grading, and identify students' strengths and learning gaps (Huang et al., 2023; Nazaretsky et al., 2022).

Despite these advantages, challenges remain, including students' limited understanding of AI, the high cost of premium tools, and questions surrounding the validity of AI-generated outputs. Educators and students alike must navigate these limitations while leveraging AI to improve learning outcomes and support research efforts (Delgado et al., 2020). In Nigeria, particularly at Olabisi Onabanjo University, students are increasingly adopting AI tools in research, yet empirical evidence evaluating the actual effectiveness of these tools remains scarce.

This study aims to fill that gap by evaluating how students at Olabisi Onabanjo University use AI for research, the effectiveness of AI tools in improving research productivity and accuracy, the benefits derived from their use, the challenges faced, and the general awareness level of AI among the student body.

The rapid introduction of artificial intelligence research tools in higher education has not produced the expected improvements in academic quality among Nigerian university students. Awareness and usage of AI tools such as ChatGPT, Grammarly, Google Bard, and other automated research systems continue to rise, but these tools have also created new academic challenges. Study shows that many students use AI mainly for shortcuts rather than genuine intellectual engagement, which increases the risk of plagiarism, academic dishonesty, and over-dependence on machine-generated content (Nguyen & Goto 2024). This reliance weakens critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving abilities, as students often accept AI-generated information without verification.

There is also growing concern about inaccurate or misleading AI content, which can lead to poor academic outputs and misinformation when students lack the skills to evaluate automated responses. The absence of clear institutional guidelines on responsible AI use further exposes students to penalties when AI-generated work is detected by plagiarism-detection systems. It is against this backdrop that this set out to evaluate AI research tool adoption among Nigerian university students.

1.1 Study objectives:

1. To investigate the level of awareness of AI among Nigerian university students.
2. To evaluate the usage level of Artificial Intelligence research tools among Nigerian university students.
3. To assess the perceived effectiveness of AI tools in enhancing research productivity and accuracy among Nigerian university students.
4. To examine the perceived benefits of using AI tools for academic research among Nigerian university students
5. To identify challenges faced by Nigerian university students in using AI research tools.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a transformative technology that has redefined various sectors, including education and research. AI refers to the simulation of human intelligence processes by machines, particularly computer systems, encompassing areas such as machine learning, natural language processing, and data analytics (Russell & Norvig, 2020). Its application as a research tool has gained traction among students due to its ability to streamline data collection, analysis, and presentation, making research processes more efficient.

One significant advantage of AI in research is its capacity to handle large datasets with precision. Tools like IBM Watson, Google Scholar AI, and machine learning models allow students to analyze extensive academic data, identify patterns, and derive insights swiftly (Yang et al., 2019). Moreover, AI-driven platforms can personalize research experiences by providing tailored recommendations, thus reducing the time spent sifting through irrelevant information.

AI also enhances accessibility to research resources. Natural Language Processing (NLP) tools like ChatGPT enable students to interact with data intuitively, assisting them in drafting research papers, creating citations, and summarizing complex texts (Lund et al., 2023). Furthermore, AI-powered plagiarism detection systems uphold academic integrity by ensuring originality in student research. However, the integration of AI in research is not without challenges. Ethical concerns, such as data privacy and bias in AI algorithms, raise questions about its reliability. Scholars argue for the need to strike a balance between automation and critical thinking to maintain academic rigor (Floridi *et al.*, 2018).

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is increasingly transforming academic research by enhancing students' efficiency, accuracy, and data-handling capabilities. Its integration into the educational sector, particularly in student-led research, has facilitated improved access to scholarly materials, streamlined data analysis, and enabled personalized learning experiences. AI applications such as natural language processing, machine learning, and

adaptive learning platforms contribute significantly to the academic productivity of students (Alang & Ganesan, 2019; Nguyen et al., 2020).

Students now leverage tools like Google Scholar AI, Grammarly, ChatGPT, Turnitin, NVivo, and SPSS to conduct literature reviews, manage citations, detect plagiarism, and perform qualitative and quantitative data analysis (Kumar et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2019; Salvador & Borja, 2021). These tools not only support faster research processes but also foster deeper cognitive engagement through automated feedback and writing assistance (Rodriguez et al., 2020).

However, while AI presents numerous advantages, its use also raises ethical concerns such as data privacy, algorithmic bias, and unequal access due to socio-economic disparities (Binns et al., 2018; Gunkel et al., 2022). These concerns necessitate a more responsible and equitable approach to AI integration in academia. Institutions must train students in digital literacy and embed ethical AI practices into the curriculum to ensure that AI is used effectively and responsibly in research.

AI is a powerful catalyst in reshaping academic research among students, promoting analytical depth, saving time, and enhancing research quality. Nonetheless, addressing the ethical and technical challenges it poses is critical for sustainable and inclusive educational development.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is reshaping student research by enhancing efficiency, accessibility, and analytical capabilities. Tools such as ChatGPT, Grammarly, and IBM Watson support literature reviews, data analysis, and hypothesis generation, thus improving productivity and collaboration. AI fosters global academic engagement, enabling students to access virtual libraries and participate in international discourse (Smith & Brown, 2020). However, challenges persist, including algorithmic biases, data privacy concerns, ethical risks such as plagiarism, high costs, and limited access in under-resourced areas (Chen et al., 2018; McGee, 2020; Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019). Furthermore, the opaque nature of some AI tools can hinder critical thinking (Doshi-Velez & Kim, 2018), and over-reliance on these systems may weaken analytical skills.

The Technological Acceptance Model (TAM), introduced by Davis in 1989, explains how students adopt AI tools. It focuses on two main ideas: how easy the tools feel to use and how useful students believe they are. These two factors strongly shape students' willingness to use AI technologies. Studies show that user-friendly and clearly beneficial AI systems are more likely to be adopted (Zhang et al., 2021; Hossain et al., 2020). External variables such as institutional support and training further enhance acceptance (Al-Emran et al., 2018). Therefore, to fully harness AI's potential, educational institutions

must address ethical concerns, promote transparency, and equip students with the skills and resources to use AI tools responsibly and effectively.

Several recent studies have evaluated the effectiveness of Artificial Intelligence (AI) as a research tool among students, highlighting its potential benefits and challenges.

Smith (2023) conducted a quantitative survey across various disciplines and found that AI tools significantly boosted students' research productivity by automating routine tasks like data analysis and information retrieval. However, students were skeptical of AI's ability to evaluate complex academic materials, emphasizing the need for human oversight.

Chen (2022) used an experimental design to compare students who used AI tools with those relying on traditional methods. The AI group performed 30% better in research quality, particularly in literature reviews and data synthesis. Nevertheless, concerns were raised about AI's limitations in understanding nuanced topics.

Johnson (2021) utilized in-depth interviews to explore students' perspectives. While many appreciated the efficiency AI tools provided, concerns emerged regarding overreliance, which some feared could erode critical thinking and creativity. Johnson recommended integrating guidelines for balanced AI usage in academia.

Williams (2020), in a longitudinal study, found that AI users completed research faster and processed more data. However, the tools did not enhance critical analysis or writing skills. The study concluded that AI should complement rather than replace traditional research competencies.

Davis (2024) surveyed a broad group of students and found that 85% felt AI improved their research efficiency. Even with this positive impact, many still worried about issues like plagiarism, misuse, and data privacy. Davis recommended that schools to provide structured training and clear ethical guidelines to support responsible use.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative research design using the descriptive survey method, which is widely recognized for collecting data from a defined population to understand their opinions, behaviours, and characteristics. The population comprised all undergraduate students of Olabisi Onabanjo University (OOU), Ago-Iwoye, Ogun State, estimated at 49,273. Since studying the entire population was impractical, a representative sample was determined using Taro Yamane's (1967) formula for finite populations. With a 5% margin of error, the calculation yielded a sample size of approximately 396.7, which was rounded up to 397 respondents, ensuring a 95% confidence level.

The target population included undergraduates from the Faculties of Arts, Education, and Law. A Simple Random Sampling (SRS) technique was adopted to give each student an equal chance of selection, reducing bias and enhancing generalizability. Data were collected using structured questionnaires, an established instrument for eliciting information on attitudes, beliefs, practices, and demographics (Obasi, 2017). To minimize logistical challenges, the questionnaires were distributed online through Google Forms, email, and WhatsApp, enabling efficient data collection at reduced cost.

3.1 Data presentation, analysis and interpretation

Table 1: Analysis of demographic data of respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	187	47.1%
	Female	210	52.9%
Age Group	18–20 years	117	29.5%
	21–25 years	166	41.8%
	26–30 years	100	25.2%
	30 years above	14	3.5%
Level	100 Level	107	27.0%
	200 Level	131	33.0%
	300 Level	92	23.2%
	400 Level	67	16.9%
Total		397	100%

Source: Researcher’s Field Survey, 2025

The demographic profile of the respondents is presented in Table 1. The gender distribution shows that females constituted the majority of the sample, with 210 respondents (52.9%), while males accounted for 187 respondents (47.1%). This slight female dominance suggests that women were more responsive to the survey, which is significant given the subject of the study, as women are often directly affected by issues relating to domestic violence and media portrayals.

The age distribution reveals that the majority of respondents were young adults, consistent with the typical undergraduate population. Respondents aged 21–25 years represented the largest proportion (41.8%), followed by those aged 18–20 years (29.5%) and 26–30 years (25.2%). Only 3.5% of respondents were above 30 years. This indicates that the findings largely reflect the perspectives of young people within the conventional university age range, who are also the primary consumers of television and online media.

In terms of academic level, the majority of respondents were in their second year (200 level), accounting for 33.0% of the sample, followed by 100 level students (27.0%). Students in 300 level and 400 level comprised 23.2% and 16.9% of the sample, respectively. This distribution suggests a higher response rate among lower-level undergraduates compared to final-year students, which may reflect their greater availability and willingness to participate in research activities.

Table 2: Awareness of AI among students of Olabisi Onabanjo University

Research Item	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)
I have heard about AI before	132 (33.3%)	166 (41.8%)	55 (13.9%)	44 (11.1%)
I understand the basic concept of AI	111 (27.9%)	155 (39.0%)	89 (22.4%)	42 (10.7%)
I can explain AI to someone else	122 (30.7%)	144 (36.3%)	77 (19.4%)	54 (13.6%)
I am aware of AI's impact in daily life	144 (36.3%)	155 (39.0%)	55 (13.9%)	43 (10.8%)

Source: Researcher's Field Survey (2025)

The data in Table 2 above show general awareness of AI is high (75.1%). Understanding and ability to explain AI follows closely (66.8% each), though gaps remain. Notably, 75.3% recognize AI's impact in daily life. These findings indicate a strong foundational awareness, but deeper comprehension and communication skills can still be enhanced through targeted education initiatives.

Table 2: Usage level of Artificial Intelligence (AI) as a research tool

Research Item	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)
Awareness of AI tools for research	136 (34.3%)	94 (23.7%)	82 (20.7%)	85 (21.4%)
Frequency of AI tool usage in academic research	221 (55.7%)	98 (24.7%)	44 (11.1%)	34 (8.6%)
Use of AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT, Grammarly, Bard) for research idea generation	166 (41.8%)	104 (26.2%)	72 (18.1%)	55 (13.9%)
AI tools simplify literature review	89 (22.4%)	77 (19.4%)	116 (29.2%)	115 (29.0%)

Source: Researcher's Field Survey (2025)

In table 3 above, the responses show that awareness of AI tools is relatively high, with 58% of students affirming familiarity. Usage frequency is even higher, as 80.4% agree that AI tools are frequently used in academic research. Over two-thirds (68%) use AI tools like ChatGPT or Grammarly for idea development. However, opinion is split on the usefulness of AI for literature reviews, with 58.2% expressing skepticism. This suggests a need for training on how AI can effectively support more complex research tasks.

Table 4: Effectiveness of AI tools in enhancing research skills

Research Item	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)
AI improves ability to find academic resources	132 (33.3%)	166 (41.8%)	55 (13.9%)	43 (10.8%)
AI enhances accuracy of research findings	111 (27.9%)	155 (39.0%)	89 (22.4%)	42 (10.7%)
Grammar/plagiarism AI tools improve academic writing quality	122 (30.7%)	144 (36.3%)	77 (19.4%)	54 (13.6%)
AI makes it easier to organize/analyze research data	144 (36.3%)	155 (39.0%)	55 (13.9%)	43 (10.8%)

Source: Researcher's Field Survey (2025)

Data in Table 3 highlights positive student sentiment toward AI's effectiveness. Most students (75.1%) believe AI helps locate academic resources. Additionally, 66.9% say AI enhances research accuracy, and 66.8% agree it improves writing quality. A strong 75.3% agree that AI tools aid in organizing and analyzing data. The findings suggest that students recognize the broad utility of AI across multiple research functions.

Table 5: Benefits of AI research tools

Research Item	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)
AI improves academic performance by providing quick access to information	199 (50.1%)	111 (27.9%)	55 (13.9%)	32 (8.1%)
AI tools help in understanding complex concepts	221 (55.7%)	100 (25.2%)	44 (11.1%)	32 (8.1%)
AI tools reduce time spent on research tasks	166 (41.8%)	132 (33.2%)	66 (16.6%)	33 (8.3%)
AI tools develop analytical and critical thinking skills	210 (52.9%)	122 (30.7%)	44 (11.1%)	21 (5.3%)

Source: Researcher's Field Survey (2025)

Analysis of data in Table 5 shows that students largely recognize the benefits of AI tools. Over 78% agree that AI enhances performance via fast information access, and 81% see it as useful for understanding complex topics. A combined 75% say AI saves research time, and 83.6% believe it fosters analytical thinking. These findings confirm AI's role as a valuable academic support tool.

Table 6: Challenges in using AI research tools

Research Item	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)
Difficulty in understanding how to use AI tools	136 (34.3%)	94 (23.7%)	82 (20.7%)	85 (21.4%)
Lack of proper training on AI tools	221 (55.7%)	98 (24.7%)	44 (11.1%)	34 (8.6%)
Cost of accessing premium AI tools is a challenge	166 (41.8%)	104 (26.2%)	72 (18.1%)	55 (13.9%)
AI tool outputs are too complex to interpret	89 (22.4%)	77 (19.4%)	116 (29.2%)	115 (29.0%)

Source: Researcher's Field Survey (2025)

Table 6 above revealed that the most cited challenge is lack of training (80.4%), followed by difficulty in using AI tools (58%). Cost is a significant barrier for 68% of respondents. Only a minority (41.8%) find AI-generated content too complex to use, suggesting that technical output is less of a barrier compared to usability and accessibility. The findings highlight the need for training programs and affordable AI access.

4. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of this study reveal a high level of usage of artificial intelligence (AI) tools as research aids among students at Olabisi Onabanjo University. A significant 80.5% of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that they frequently use AI tools for academic research. This suggests a substantial integration of AI into students' academic routines. Furthermore, awareness of AI tools was notably high, with 58% of respondents indicating knowledge of such tools and their usefulness in research. However, 42% demonstrated a lack of awareness, indicating a gap in exposure and accessibility. Popular tools such as ChatGPT, Grammarly, and Google Bard were widely used, with 68% of students reporting that these tools assist in generating and refining research ideas. While most students are familiar with and use AI for academic purposes, the data indicate that some students may still require further training and orientation to maximize the benefits of AI in academic research (Smith, 2023; Jones & Patel, 2022).

Students perceive AI tools as highly effective in enhancing their research competencies, productivity, and output accuracy. Approximately 75.2% of respondents agreed that AI

tools improve their ability to locate relevant academic resources, indicating the efficiency of AI-powered search engines and databases. Additionally, 66.9% of participants affirmed that AI tools help improve the accuracy of their research findings, while 66.8% reported that tools such as grammar checkers and plagiarism detectors significantly enhance the quality of their written academic work. Moreover, 75.2% agreed that AI supports the organization and analysis of research data. Nevertheless, some skepticism remains, as 33.2% of respondents expressed concerns about the reliability of AI-generated outputs, highlighting the need for critical evaluation of AI results, especially in complex academic contexts (Clark, 2023; Williams & White, 2022).

The advantages of using AI in research are significant. Over 78% of participants said AI tools boost academic performance by giving them faster access to information, which is a key part of working efficiently. Furthermore, 81% agreed that tools like ChatGPT help them understand complex concepts, demonstrating AI's capacity to simplify difficult academic material. AI tools also contribute to time efficiency, with 75.2% of respondents noting that these tools reduce the time spent on research-related tasks. Notably, 83.5% indicated that AI usage enhances critical thinking and analytical skills, implying that AI tools not only support information retrieval but also contribute to students' cognitive and intellectual development (Peterson, 2022; Carter & King, 2021).

Despite the positive reception, students encounter notable challenges in effectively utilizing AI tools. A significant proportion (58%) reported difficulties in using AI research tools efficiently, pointing to a skills gap. Moreover, 80.5% identified inadequate training as a major barrier, emphasizing the need for structured instructional programs to enhance student competence. The cost of premium AI services was also reported as a limitation, with 68% citing affordability as a concern. Although 58.2% of respondents felt confident interpreting AI outputs, 22.3% found the results too complex to understand or apply, underscoring the importance of simplifying AI interfaces and results to suit user needs (Brown, 2023; Singh & Kumar, 2022).

Awareness of AI among students was generally high but varied in depth. Approximately 75.2% of respondents had heard of AI, and 66.9% understood its basic functionality. However, the ability to explain AI to others was more limited, with only 66.8% expressing moderate understanding and 33.1% indicating discomfort in explaining AI concepts. The most widely recognized aspect was AI's influence on daily life, with 75.2% acknowledging its integration into everyday applications. While foundational awareness exists, a more in-depth understanding of AI's mechanisms and implications remains limited, suggesting the need for expanded educational initiatives to bridge the gap between surface-level awareness and comprehensive knowledge (Thompson, 2022; Jackson, 2021).

5. CONCLUSION

The study has demonstrated that artificial intelligence (AI) is significantly transforming the landscape of academic research, particularly among students. By closely examining patterns of AI utilization, the research highlights the role of AI tools in streamlining access to information, enhancing data analysis, and fostering critical engagement through diverse perspectives. A substantial number of students reported improvements in the efficiency and accuracy of their academic work following the adoption of AI-powered platforms, including academic search engines, citation generators, and data analytics tools.

However, the findings also reveal notable challenges associated with AI use in research. These include over-reliance on technology, exposure to inaccurate or misleading information, and the potential decline in critical thinking skills. Additionally, disparities in access to advanced AI tools among students pose equity concerns, potentially affecting the quality of their academic outputs.

Overall, AI represents a valuable asset in academic research, offering opportunities for enhanced productivity and deeper learning. Nonetheless, its use must be guided by ethical considerations and critical engagement. The study recommends that institutions such as Olabisi Onabanjo University integrate AI literacy into their curricula to equip students with both technical proficiency and evaluative judgment. With appropriate support structures in place, AI can continue to redefine academic inquiry, producing a generation of informed, capable, and innovative researchers.

5.1 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to strengthen the effective integration and utilization of AI tools in academic research:

1. The university should embed AI literacy programs within the academic curriculum through dedicated workshops, seminars, and short-term training courses. This will equip students with the knowledge and skills needed to utilize AI tools effectively and responsibly in their academic pursuits.
2. Collaboration between the university's library and IT units is essential to provide students with licensed access to advanced AI applications. Investments in infrastructure, including stable internet connectivity, software licenses, and technical support, are crucial for ensuring equitable access and fostering widespread adoption.
3. Lecturers and research supervisors should receive training to guide students on the ethical application of AI in research. There needs to be a strong focus on academic integrity and on using AI tools to support and not to replace independent critical thinking.

4. Regular assessment of the effectiveness and relevance of AI tools should be undertaken through feedback mechanisms involving both students and faculty. This will ensure that the tools remain aligned with evolving academic needs and research objectives.

Implementing these recommendations will not only strengthen students' research competencies but also contribute to a more dynamic and technologically enriched academic environment where AI is harnessed effectively and ethically.

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