



INTERROGATION OF THE LEGAL EFFECT OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE ON LEGAL RESEARCH IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The accelerating integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into legal processes has begun to transform the methodologies, speed, and accuracy of legal research globally, with Nigeria gradually experiencing similar shifts. This paper interrogates the legal effect of AI on legal research in Nigeria, evaluating both its disruptive potential and its implications for professional responsibility, access to justice, and the development of jurisprudence. It examines how AI-driven tools such as automated document review systems, predictive analytics, natural-language research engines, and machine-learning case-law databases are reshaping traditional research paradigms previously anchored on manual case analysis, text-based statutory review, and extensive library-centered scholarship. The study situates these technological innovations within Nigeria's evolving regulatory environment, particularly considering the absence of a unified national AI policy, emerging data protection frameworks, and ethical standards governing lawyers' use of technology. The interrogation further explores the gaps in Nigeria's legal education system, which largely remains unaligned with technological competence requirements, thereby affecting lawyers' ability to responsibly harness AI tools. The paper concludes that AI's legal effect on research in Nigeria is both transformative and disruptive, necessitating comprehensive legislative intervention, institutional reforms, and ethical guidelines to ensure that technological adoption strengthens, rather than undermines, the integrity of legal research and the administration of justice.

KEYWORDS: *Artificial Intelligence, Ethical Standards, Legal Research, Reforms and Technology.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has emerged as one of the most transformative technological developments of the twenty-first century, exerting profound influence across various domains, including law, governance, finance, and social interaction. In the legal sector, AI increasingly shapes how information is generated, processed, retrieved, and applied in decision-making. Legal research, traditionally dependent on manual case analysis, statutory interpretation, and doctrinal investigation, now stands at the centre of this technological disruption. The Nigerian legal system, with its reliance on judicial precedent, extensive statutory enactments, and a steadily expanding body of case law, offers a fertile ground for examining the implications of AI on legal research practices. As digital platforms such as Law Pavilion, Legal Pedia, and global tools like LexisNexis



and Westlaw adopt AI-driven analytics, the normative and practical effects of AI on legal research in Nigeria have become increasingly prominent.¹

Legal research serves as the backbone of legal reasoning, litigation strategy, statutory interpretation, and scholarly development.² Its accuracy and depth determine, to a large extent, the quality of legal arguments and judicial outcomes. AI introduces new dimensions to this process through machine-learning algorithms capable of automated document review, semantic search, predictive analytics, and natural-language processing. These innovations not only enhance research efficiency but also introduce new concerns relating to data accuracy, algorithmic bias, confidentiality, and the ethical responsibilities of practitioners. In developed jurisdictions, courts and law firms have already begun institutionalising AI tools for research, risk assessment, and decision support systems.³ Nigerian practice, although evolving more slowly, shows significant movement toward similar adoption, necessitating scholarly interrogation of the legal implications of such technological dependence.

Despite its potential, AI raises legal and professional dilemmas. First is the question of reliability: AI systems may misinterpret legal context, generate incorrect citations, or reproduce biased outputs based on flawed training datasets.⁴ Second, the increasing reliance on foreign-designed AI tools raises concerns about contextual applicability to Nigeria's unique constitutional, statutory, and customary legal systems. Third, AI implicates professional ethics. The Rules of Professional Conduct for Legal Practitioners (RPC) impose duties of competence, diligence, confidentiality, and fidelity to the law, duties potentially threatened by uncritical dependence on AI-generated results.⁵ Without regulatory clarity, lawyers may face liability for errors arising from AI-assisted research, especially where due diligence is compromised.

Nigeria's regulatory landscape further complicates the discourse. While the Nigeria Data Protection Act (NDPA) 2023 provides a framework for privacy and personal-data safeguards, the country currently lacks an integrated national AI regulatory law.⁶ Existing policy instruments, such as the draft National Artificial Intelligence Strategy, remain largely non-binding, offering limited guidance on matters relating to transparency, accountability, algorithmic fairness, and legal responsibility. The absence of clear standards raises pressing questions: What is the legal status of AI-produced research? How should courts evaluate arguments formulated through algorithmic

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¹ Law Pavillion, *AI-Powered Legal Analytics: Transforming Legal Research in Nigeria* (2021).

² T A Aguda, 'Practice and Procedure in Nigerian Courts' (2020) 4–5.

³ R Susskind, 'Tomorrow's Lawyers: An Introduction to Your Future' (2017) 53–61.

⁴ European Commission, *Ethics Guidelines for Trustworthy AI* (2019).

⁵ Rules of Professional Conduct for Legal Practitioners (RPC) 2007, s14 & 15.

⁶ Nigeria Data Protection Act 2023, s2–4.



assistance? What ethical and regulatory obligations should govern legal professionals using AI tools? These gaps underscore the urgency of a comprehensive investigation into the legal effects of AI on legal research within the Nigerian context. Furthermore, Nigeria's legal education system, comprising universities, the Nigerian Law School, and postgraduate institutions, has yet to meaningfully integrate AI literacy into curricula. This deficiency creates a widening skills gap between global legal practice trends and local capacity.⁷ Without structured training on digital research methods and AI-supported reasoning, new entrants into the profession risk becoming increasingly unprepared for technologically mediated legal practice.

Against this background, this paper interrogates the legal effect of artificial intelligence on legal research in Nigeria, with specific attention to its doctrinal, ethical, and regulatory implications. It critically analyses the opportunities AI presents for research efficiency and access to justice while also highlighting the systemic risks and professional challenges inherent in its integration. By exploring comparative insights, Nigeria's regulatory context, and the evolving nature of legal practice, this study aims to contribute to scholarly discourse on how law and technology intersect in shaping the future of legal research in Nigeria.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Understanding the legal effect of artificial intelligence (AI) on legal research in Nigeria requires anchoring the analysis on established theoretical constructs that explain the relationship between law, technology, institutional behaviour, and socio-legal change. This work will examine four principal theoretical frameworks: Technological Determinism, Socio-Legal Theory of Legal Change, Legal Information Theory, and the Risk Regulation and Professional Ethics Framework. Together, these theories provide a multidimensional foundation for interrogating how AI reshapes legal research practices and professional norms within the Nigerian legal system.

A. Technological Determinism

Technological determinism posits that technological innovations exert autonomous influence over social institutions, cultural norms, and professional practices, often compelling structural adjustment irrespective of pre-existing legal or ethical frameworks.⁸ Within this paradigm, AI is understood not merely as a tool but as a transformative force capable of altering the methodology, speed, and conceptualisation of legal research. As advanced analytics and machine-learning algorithms become embedded in Nigerian legal research tools such as Law Pavillion Prime and Legalpedia AI Assistant, the legal community experiences a shift from manual doctrinal analysis to automated, prediction-driven research.

⁷ A Adebo, 'Technology and Legal Education in Nigeria,' [2020] 2(9) *Nigerian Journal of Legal Studies*, 45–58.

⁸ J Smith, *Technology and Social Change* (2018) 112–114.



This theory highlights the inherent tension between traditional legal research, which emphasizes human reasoning, interpretive skill, and doctrinal depth, and AI-enabled processes that prioritize computational efficiency and pattern recognition. Consequently, Nigerian lawyers, scholars, and judicial officers increasingly confront a technological landscape that demands adaptation, continuous skill acquisition, and recalibration of long-standing research methods.

B. Socio-Legal Theory of Legal Change

Socio-legal theorists argue that law does not evolve in isolation but responds dynamically to social, economic, and technological forces.⁹ Applying this theory to AI's emergence in the Nigerian legal sector underscores the interaction between technological advancement and institutional adaptation. AI adoption alters expectations concerning research timelines, evidentiary quality, and argumentation depth. Courts now encounter legal submissions prepared through AI-augmented research, while law firms face competitive pressures to adopt more efficient technologies to remain relevant.

This framework explains why the Nigerian legal profession cannot ignore AI's influence despite regulatory gaps. As society increasingly digitises, litigants, corporate clients, and public institutions demand faster and more accurate legal services. In response, legal research practices must evolve, prompting doctrinal reconsiderations in procedural law, evidence, ethics, and legal education. Socio-legal theory therefore situates AI not as an external threat but as a catalyst for normative and institutional transformation.

C. Legal Information Theory

Legal information theory evaluates how legal data is generated, structured, accessed, and applied, particularly in relation to information technologies.¹⁰ AI's role in legal research is best understood through this lens because legal information, cases, statutes, regulations, scholarly commentary, constitutes the raw material upon which AI systems operate. AI-based research tools rely on extensive datasets, natural language processing (NLP), and semantic indexing to retrieve and analyse legal content.¹¹ However, the quality of AI-generated research is directly dependent on the accuracy, completeness, and contextual relevance of the underlying legal database. This theory therefore illuminates critical concerns such as:

- A. Whether Nigerian case law databases are sufficiently comprehensive for AI training;
- B. The risk of algorithmic omission in jurisdictions with incomplete digital reporting systems;
- C. The contextual misinterpretation of customary law or indigenous jurisprudence by foreign-trained AI models; and

⁹ R Cotterrell, *The Sociology of Law* (2006) 45–49.

¹⁰ R Berring, 'Legal Information and the Search for Authority', [1994] *California Law Review* 167–172.

¹¹ A Kaplan, & M Haenlein, "Siri, Siri in My Hand," *Business Horizons* (2019) 17–28.



- D. The danger of over-reliance on automated outputs that may lack nuanced doctrinal reasoning.

Legal information theory thus demonstrates that AI cannot be more reliable than the quality and structure of the legal information ecosystem that supports it.

D. Risk Regulation and Professional Ethics Framework

AI's integration into legal research introduces a spectrum of risks: data breaches, algorithmic bias, inaccurate citations, misinterpretation of legal contexts, and unverified legal recommendations.¹² The risk regulation framework provides a theoretical foundation for understanding how legal systems identify, evaluate, mitigate, and regulate such risks. In Nigeria, where formal AI regulation remains underdeveloped, this framework exposes the vulnerabilities faced by legal practitioners who rely on AI tools without clear statutory or ethical safeguards. Complementing the risk regulation model is the professional ethics framework, which draws from the Rules of Professional Conduct (RPC) 2007 and broader theories of legal professional responsibility.¹³ AI challenges core ethical obligations such as:

- i. **Competence**, requiring lawyers to understand the capabilities and limitations of AI tools;
- ii. **Confidentiality**, especially where client information is input into cloud-based systems;
- iii. **Diligence**, which may be compromised by uncritical acceptance of AI-generated results; and
- iv. **Accountability**, since the lawyer, not the AI, remains responsible for errors in legal submissions.

These frameworks collectively demonstrate that AI's legal effect extends beyond research efficiency to encompass ethical accountability, regulatory compliance, and risk management responsibilities for Nigerian legal practitioners.

E. Synthesis of the Theoretical Framework

Taken together, these theories explain that the impact of AI on legal research in Nigeria is not merely technological but systemic. It reshapes professional norms, informational structures, institutional expectations, and ethical obligations. They also provide a foundation for the paper's subsequent doctrinal and empirical analysis, establishing that AI's growing role in legal research must be assessed through a multi-layered theoretical lens that captures its legal, social, technological, and ethical dimensions.

¹² European Commission, *Ethics Guidelines for Trustworthy AI* (2019).

¹³ Rules of Professional Conduct for Legal Practitioners (RPC) 2007, s14, 15 & 20.



3. DOCTRINAL ANALYSIS OF AI AND LEGAL RESEARCH IN NIGERIA

In this instance, we shall examine the doctrinal dimensions of artificial intelligence (AI) as they relate to legal research in Nigeria. It focuses on the constitutional, statutory, judicial, and professional regulatory frameworks that shape the legal status, admissibility, and ethical use of AI-assisted research within the Nigerian legal system. The analysis reveals that although AI is increasingly embedded in legal research methodologies, Nigerian law remains largely silent on its regulation, creating ambiguities concerning the reliability, authority, and professional responsibility associated with AI-generated outputs.

A. Constitutional Context

The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended) does not expressly address artificial intelligence or digital technology in legal research. However, constitutional provisions indirectly shape the legal environment in which AI operates.

First, **Section 36(1)** guarantees the right to fair hearing, which includes an expectation that judicial reasoning should be based on accurate and reliable legal authorities. Where AI-generated research introduces errors, through incorrect citations, misinterpretations of precedent, or fabricated authorities, the fairness of proceedings may be compromised. This raises doctrinal questions regarding whether reliance on flawed AI research could amount to a violation of fair-hearing rights.

Second, **Section 39** on freedom of expression and access to information provides a constitutional foundation for the development and use of AI research tools that enable broad access to legal materials. However, this right must be balanced with privacy rights under **Section 37**, especially when AI systems process client-sensitive data for research purposes.

Third, the Constitution places significant emphasis on judicial independence. The increasing use of AI-assisted research by judges and judicial staff raises doctrinal concerns about whether algorithm-driven insights could unduly influence judicial discretion. This necessitates clearer regulatory controls to ensure that AI supports, not supplants, judicial reasoning.

B. Statutory and Policy Frameworks

i. Nigeria Data Protection Act (NDPA) 2023

The most relevant statutory framework influencing AI-assisted legal research is the Nigeria Data Protection Act (NDPA) 2023. The Act regulates the processing of personal data and mandates principles of lawfulness, fairness, transparency, accuracy, and accountability.¹⁴ Legal research

¹⁴ Nigeria Data Protection Act 2023, s24–30.



platforms that utilise AI to analyse case files, client data, or litigation documents fall within the scope of this regulation.

The NDPA introduces legal obligations relating to:

- a. **Data minimisation**, requiring AI tools to process only data necessary for identified purposes;
- b. **Accuracy**, which directly implicates the reliability of AI-generated research results; and
- c. **Security safeguards**, particularly where cloud-based AI tools store sensitive legal information.¹⁵

Failure to comply with these obligations exposes lawyers and legal research institutions to administrative penalties and civil liability under the Act.

ii. Evidence Act 2011

Although the Evidence Act does not explicitly regulate AI, its provisions on electronic evidence, particularly sections 84 and 258, have implications for the admissibility of AI-generated or AI-assisted materials.¹⁶ Section 84 requires authentication of electronically generated documents, which raises doctrinal questions about how AI-produced research outputs (such as predictive analytics or automated case summaries) can be authenticated in litigation. Nigerian courts have interpreted this section broadly in cases such as *Kubor v. Dickson*, affirming that electronically generated information must satisfy reliability conditions before admissibility.¹⁷ Thus, any AI-derived material tendered in court must pass the test of authenticity, accuracy, and integrity.

iii. National Information Technology Development Agency Act (NITDA Act) 2007

The NITDA Act empowers the National Information Technology Development Agency to regulate information technology standards in Nigeria.¹⁸ While the Act predates modern AI, its policy-making powers provide a legal basis for the development of AI governance guidelines. NITDA's draft National Artificial Intelligence Policy and Strategy (2024), although not law, signals emerging regulatory frameworks for AI deployment, including in the legal sector.

c. Judicial Doctrines and Case Law

Nigerian courts have not yet decided cases directly involving AI-assisted legal research. However, existing judicial principles provide doctrinal guidance.

¹⁵ Ibid, s2–4.

¹⁶ Evidence Act 2011, s84.

¹⁷ *Kubor v Dickson* (2013) 4 NWLR (Pt 1345) 534.

¹⁸ NITDA Act 2007, s6–17.



i. Doctrine of Judicial Notice and Authoritative Sources

Courts take judicial notice only of recognised legal sources, statutes, case law, and authoritative texts.¹⁹ AI-generated summaries or predictions do **not** constitute authoritative legal sources under Nigerian jurisprudence. Therefore, while AI may guide lawyers' reasoning, courts cannot rely on AI outputs as legal authorities unless accompanied by primary sources.

ii. Doctrine of Counsel's Responsibility

The long-standing doctrine that counsel is responsible for the accuracy, credibility, and quality of legal submissions remains applicable regardless of whether AI was used in preparing the material.²⁰ Nigerian courts have consistently ruled that lawyers owe a duty of professional diligence and are accountable for legal errors, omissions, or misrepresentations. This means a lawyer cannot defend negligence by claiming that an AI tool produced an incorrect result.

iii. Judicial Discretion and Algorithmic Influence

Judicial discretion, an entrenched doctrine in Nigerian adjudication, requires judges to apply independent reasoning. AI tools that summarise precedents or suggest outcomes may subtly influence this discretion. Comparative jurisprudence, such as in the United States and EU courts, warns against "automation bias," where decision-makers unconsciously defer to algorithmic outputs.²¹ Nigeria's judiciary must therefore develop guidelines to prevent undue influence from AI systems.

d. The Rules of Professional Conduct (RPC) 2007

The RPC is central to the doctrinal analysis because it defines ethical and professional obligations that directly relate to AI use in legal research.

i. Duty of Competence (Rule 16)

Rule 16 requires legal practitioners to maintain competence in the "requisite knowledge and skill" of the profession. In a technologically evolving legal environment, this duty implies that lawyers must understand the capabilities and limitations of AI tools they deploy.

ii. Duty of Confidentiality (Rule 19)

Rule 19 imposes strict confidentiality obligations. Using AI tools that store or analyse confidential client information on external servers may constitute a breach unless sufficient data-protection safeguards exist.

¹⁹ Evidence Act 2011, s122–124.

²⁰ *Okafor v Nnaife* (1987) 4 NWLR (Pt 64) 129.

²¹ B Casey, 'Automation Bias in Law', (*Harvard Journal of Law & Technology*) (2020).



iii. **Duty of Diligence (Rule 14)**

Over-reliance on AI that generates incorrect or incomplete research outcomes may amount to professional negligence. Rule 14 requires thoroughness and verification of all sources, meaning AI can assist but cannot replace human analysis.

iv. **Duty of Accountability**

The RPC places accountability solely on the lawyer, not the technology used. Thus, any doctrinal ambiguity concerning AI does not exonerate practitioners from responsibility for errors arising from AI-assisted research.

D. Doctrinal Gaps and Challenges

Three key doctrinal gaps emerge:

i. **Absence of AI-Specific Legislation:**

Nigerian law does not define AI, regulate its use, or establish liability frameworks for AI-generated legal errors.

ii. **Unclear Evidentiary Status of AI Outputs:**

There is no doctrinal clarity on how courts should treat AI-generated material such as automated case summaries or predictive analytics.

iii. **Ethical Ambiguity:**

Existing professional rules do not mention artificial intelligence, creating uncertainty about how traditional doctrines apply to AI-integrated research.

These gaps underscore the need for a robust regulatory and doctrinal framework to govern the evolving relationship between AI and legal research in Nigeria.

4. RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH AI-ASSISTED LEGAL RESEARCH

Beyond ethical and regulatory gaps, AI introduces specific risks that affect the integrity of legal practice.

A. Algorithmic Bias

AI systems may replicate and amplify biases embedded in their training data.²² If trained on incomplete, Eurocentric, or non-contextual legal datasets, AI tools may produce research outputs misaligned with Nigerian jurisprudence, customary law, or statutory peculiarities.

²² K Crawford, *'Atlas of AI'* (2021) 87–94.



B. Inaccuracy and Hallucinations

AI models may produce incorrect or fabricated legal authorities, a phenomenon known as “hallucination.” These inaccuracies can mislead lawyers, compromise litigation, and undermine the integrity of legal submissions.

C. Over-Reliance and De-Skilling

Excessive dependence on AI risks eroding traditional legal research skills such as doctrinal interpretation, analogical reasoning, and critical analysis.²³ Over time, this may weaken the intellectual foundations of legal practice, especially for younger lawyers trained in technologically mediated environments.

D. Data Security Risks

AI systems that store or process legal materials on cloud servers are vulnerable to cyberattacks, data breaches, and unauthorized access.²⁴ For practitioners handling sensitive personal data or corporate information, this creates significant ethical and legal exposure.

E. Lack of Transparency (Black-Box Problem)

Many AI systems operate using opaque algorithms whose internal decision-making processes are not transparent. This “black-box” problem raises concerns about:

- i. the verifiability of AI outputs,
- ii. their acceptability in judicial proceedings,
- iii. and their compliance with evidentiary standards.

5. COMPARATIVE JURISDICTIONAL ANALYSIS

A comparative assessment of how other jurisdictions have approached the integration, regulation, and practical use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in legal research provides valuable insights for Nigeria. This section evaluates selected jurisdictions, the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, and Singapore, to illustrate both regulatory and institutional models that could guide Nigeria in shaping a coherent legal framework.

A. United Kingdom

The United Kingdom represents one of the most advanced jurisdictions in integrating AI into legal practice and research. Law firms, courts, and academic institutions widely deploy AI tools such as Lexis AI, Westlaw Edge UK, Casetext-style platforms, and predictive analytics systems. The Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA) has issued guidance emphasizing the need for professional

²³ R Susskind, *‘Tomorrow’s Lawyers’* (2017) 44–48.

²⁴ C Kuner, “Data Security and Cloud Computing,” *International Data Privacy Law* (2019).



competence in the use of AI tools and cautioning lawyers to avoid over-reliance on algorithmic outputs to the detriment of legal judgment.²⁵

The UK has not enacted a single AI-specific statute; instead, it adopts a sector-specific and principles-based regulatory approach, relying heavily on the Data Protection Act 2018, the UK GDPR, and judicial precedent to govern responsibilities around accuracy, confidentiality, and professional negligence.²⁶ Courts have begun acknowledging the use of AI in litigation management, but still insist on traditional standards of diligence, such that erroneous AI-generated content does not excuse professional liability.²⁷

The UK model demonstrates that AI can be integrated into legal research without formal codification, provided that ethical regulators clearly define competence, confidentiality, and data-handling obligations.

B. United States of America

The United States is arguably the most AI-active jurisdiction. The legal sector uses several autonomous research platforms, including Westlaw Precision, Lexis+ AI, Casetext (CoCounsel), and bespoke law-firm-developed systems. Most significantly, American courts have already begun confronting the risks of AI-generated false content. A well-known federal case sanctioned lawyers for submitting briefs containing “hallucinated cases” generated by an AI chatbot, stressing that lawyers must personally verify research outputs irrespective of digital assistance.²⁸

Regulatory bodies such as the American Bar Association (ABA) have issued opinions affirming that the duty of competence includes understanding the benefits and limitations of AI technologies.²⁹ Additionally, ABA Model Rule 1.6 requires lawyers to ensure AI systems do not compromise client confidentiality. Policies such as the NIST AI Risk Management Framework (2023), although not law, have shaped institutional best practices on trustworthy AI. The U.S. approach is characterized by judicial enforcement, professional ethics guidance, and institutional technological investment, making it a useful model for Nigeria’s courts and law faculties.

C. Canada

Canada provides a hybrid model that combines ethical regulation with government-backed national AI standards. The Federation of Law Societies of Canada (FLSC) recognizes AI tools as part of the

²⁵ Solicitors Regulation Authority, *Guidance on Technology and Legal Services* (2022).

²⁶ UK Data Protection Act 2018; UK GDPR.

²⁷ J Williams, “AI and Professional Negligence in the United Kingdom,” *Modern Law Review* (2023).

²⁸ *Mata v. Avianca Inc.*, 2023 WL 4114965 (S.D.N.Y.).

²⁹ ABA Formal Opinion No. 512 (2023): “*The Use of Artificial Intelligence in Legal Practice*.”



modern competence obligation, requiring lawyers to understand the cybersecurity and accuracy risks associated with AI-based research tools.³⁰

A distinguishing feature of Canadian regulation is the federal government's Directive on Automated Decision-Making (2019), which imposes algorithmic transparency, bias assessment, and human-oversight obligations on public-sector AI systems.³¹ Although the directive applies primarily to government agencies, it influences courts, universities, and the private sector. Legal research providers in Canada also embed transparency indicators that allow users to evaluate the provenance of AI outputs. Canada's model is notable for its emphasis on algorithmic fairness and risk assessment, which Nigeria could adopt to mitigate bias in AI legal research systems.

D. Singapore

Singapore stands out as a leading jurisdiction in AI governance and legal-tech innovation. Through the Model AI Governance Framework (2020), Singapore outlines principles for transparency, accountability, and human-in-the-loop verification for AI decision-making.³² Additionally, the Singapore Academy of Law (SAL) has invested heavily in integrating AI into research processes, including curated case databases and predictive-analytics engines tailored to Singaporean jurisprudence.

Singaporean courts have piloted AI-enabled tools for sentencing consistency and legal-research assistance, but these tools are subject to strict internal review and auditing to ensure judicial accuracy.³³ The government also promotes innovation through a collaborative ecosystem involving academia, technology companies, and the judiciary. The Singapore model demonstrates how a small but technologically ambitious jurisdiction can combine flexible regulation with strong institutional leadership, a framework Nigeria could emulate.

6. LESSONS FOR NIGERIA

Across all the examined jurisdictions, the following common principles emerge:

a. AI Competency as a Professional Obligation

Lawyers must understand AI's capabilities and limitations. Regulatory bodies (e.g., NBA, LPDC) in Nigeria can adopt similar competence frameworks.

b. Human Oversight as a Mandatory Safeguard

All jurisdictions emphasize that AI outputs must be manually verified. Nigerian courts and the Council of Legal Education could embed this principle in procedural rules and legal-education standards.

³⁰ Federation of Law Societies of Canada, *Model Code of Professional Conduct Commentary on Technological Competence*.

³¹ Government of Canada, *Directive on Automated Decision-Making* (2019).

³² Singapore Personal Data Protection Commission, *Model AI Governance Framework* (2nd Ed., 2020).

³³ Singapore Academy of Law, *Legal Technology Vision* (2022).



c. **Ethical and Data-Protection Anchoring**

Strong data privacy and confidentiality rules underpin AI adoption. Nigeria’s Data Protection Act 2023 provides a good foundation.

d. **Institutional Investment in Legal-Tech Ecosystems**

Jurisdictions such as Singapore and the U.S. illustrate that AI adoption succeeds where governments and legal institutions invest in platforms, training, and collaborative innovation.

e. **Transparency and Explainability Requirements**

Canadian and Singaporean approaches highlight the need for auditability—an essential safeguard Nigeria lacks but could introduce.

By drawing from these comparative models, Nigeria can develop a balanced framework: one that encourages technological innovation while preserving professional ethics, judicial integrity, and the accuracy of legal reasoning.

7. FINDINGS

This study yields several critical findings on the legal effect of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on legal research in Nigeria, derived from doctrinal analysis, comparative insights, and an evaluation of the existing professional and regulatory framework.

A. AI Has Significantly Transformed the Methodology and Speed of Legal Research

The study finds that AI has substantially altered how lawyers, judges, academics, and law students conduct legal research in Nigeria. AI-powered platforms provide real-time document review, predictive analytics, and semantic search capabilities, enabling users to retrieve relevant authorities far more efficiently than manual or traditional digital methods. This transformation demonstrates AI’s growing centrality to legal research workflows in modern legal practice.

B. Nigerian Legal Practice Has Not Fully Maximised AI’s Potential

Despite observable integration of AI into legal workflows by some commercial law firms and academic institutions, the study finds that adoption remains fragmented and inconsistent across the country. Many practitioners continue to rely on manual research due to factors such as:

- i. Limited access to cutting-edge AI research platforms,
- ii. Inadequate digital literacy,
- iii. Infrastructural deficits, and
- iv. Resistance to technological change.

As a result, the transformative potential of AI in Nigerian legal research remains underutilised.



C. The Regulatory Framework Lags Behind Technological Innovation

The findings reveal that Nigeria lacks a comprehensive policy, ethical guideline, or statutory instrument specifically addressing the use of AI in legal research. While existing laws—such as the Nigeria Data Protection Act 2023, provide a foundational regulatory basis, they do not adequately address:

- i. Verification of AI-generated research outputs,
- ii. Professional liability for AI-related errors,
- iii. Algorithmic bias,
- iv. Data confidentiality concerns, and
- v. Standards of technological competence for legal practitioners.

The absence of targeted regulation creates uncertainty and potential professional risks.

D. AI Tools Pose Risks of Inaccuracy, Hallucination, and Over-Reliance

The study finds a recurring theme across jurisdictions: AI systems are prone to generating fabricated cases, misleading citations, or inaccurately summarised legal principles, especially where unsupervised generative AI is used. Without strict verification, Nigerian lawyers risk relying on erroneous outputs, which may amount to professional misconduct or negligence. This risk is compounded by limited awareness about the technical functioning and limitations of AI tools.

E. Ethical and Professional Standards in Nigeria Do Not Yet Reflect AI Competence Requirements

Unlike the UK, U.S., and Canada, where professional bodies have updated ethical rules to include digital and AI competence, Nigeria’s Rules of Professional Conduct (RPC 2023) do not expressly impose obligations requiring lawyers to understand or supervise AI tools. This reveals a **regulatory gap** that undermines accountability, competence, and the integrity of AI-assisted legal research.

F. AI Raises Novel Concerns About Client Confidentiality and Data Security

The study finds that many AI-powered platforms rely on cloud-based architectures that may store, process, or train on sensitive legal data. The lack of clear ethical guidelines in Nigeria means that practitioners risk **unintentionally exposing privileged information**, contravening core legal-ethics obligations. AI’s use therefore heightens the need for robust confidentiality safeguards.

G. There Is a Clear Need for Human Oversight and Verification Mechanisms

AI, regardless of its sophistication, cannot replace the interpretive, analytical, and contextual judgment that legal research requires. The study finds that all jurisdictions examined emphasize **human-in-the-loop verification**, ensuring that legal researchers validate AI outputs. Nigeria must adopt this approach to prevent the mechanical acceptance of AI-generated content.



H. Comparative Jurisdictions Present Models Nigeria Can Emulate

The analysis reveals that jurisdictions such as the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, and Singapore provide useful examples of effective oversight mechanisms, including:

- i. Competence-based ethical obligations,
- ii. Government-issued AI governance frameworks,
- iii. Algorithmic transparency requirements, and
- iv. Institutional AI auditing systems.

These models demonstrate that structured governance enhances the safe and effective use of AI in legal research.

I. Legal Education in Nigeria Has Not Adequately Integrated AI Literacy

The study discovers that most Nigerian law faculties continue to rely on traditional teaching methods, with minimal emphasis on AI-based legal research tools. This deficiency results in graduating lawyers who are ill-equipped to function effectively in a technology-driven legal environment, widening the competence gap between Nigerian lawyers and their international counterparts.

J. AI Has the Potential to Democratise Access to Justice—If Properly Regulated

The findings show that AI-powered research tools can help reduce the cost of legal services, enhance access to legal information, and assist public-interest lawyers and pro bono practitioners. However, without regulation, training, and infrastructure, this potential remains largely unrealised.

8. CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that Artificial Intelligence (AI) represents both a transformative opportunity and a complex challenge for legal research in Nigeria. AI-driven tools have fundamentally reshaped the research landscape by introducing unprecedented speed, accuracy, and analytical depth. Yet, the transformative capacity of AI is not evenly distributed, as many Nigerian legal practitioners, academics, and institutions still operate within traditional research paradigms due to infrastructural deficits, limited technological competence, and resistance to innovation. The result is a widening gap between Nigeria and more technologically advanced jurisdictions where AI has become central to legal research and judicial administration.

The research reveals that while AI offers significant promise, it also introduces risks, most notably inaccuracies, algorithmic hallucinations, confidentiality vulnerabilities, and the danger of over-reliance on machine-generated legal content. These risks underscore the necessity of adequate regulatory frameworks to ensure ethical and professional oversight. At present, Nigeria lacks specific laws or professional guidelines tailored to AI's role in legal research. The Rules of Professional Conduct (RPC) do not expressly impose technological competence obligations, and



there is no regulatory mechanism addressing AI-related professional negligence, data protection concerns within legal workflows, or verification standards for AI-generated content.

Comparative insights from the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, and Singapore illustrate that effective governance of AI in legal research requires a combination of professional competence standards, strong ethical guidelines, algorithmic transparency, and institutional investment. These jurisdictions demonstrate that human oversight remains essential and that AI must operate as a complementary tool rather than a substitute for legal reasoning and professional judgment.

For Nigeria, the path forward lies in embracing AI while simultaneously crafting a regulatory ecosystem that ensures accuracy, reliability, confidentiality, and accountability. This requires reforming professional ethics rules, integrating AI literacy into legal education, investing in technological infrastructure, and establishing governance mechanisms that align with global best practices. When properly regulated and responsibly utilised, AI has the potential not only to enhance the quality of legal research but also to democratise access to justice and strengthen the integrity of the Nigerian legal system. Ultimately, the interrogation of AI's legal effect on research in Nigeria reveals a dual imperative: to modernise and to regulate. Only through deliberate policy choices, institutional commitment, and a forward-looking professional culture can Nigeria maximise the benefits of AI while mitigating its inherent risks. The future of legal research in Nigeria is inseparable from technological evolution, and embracing this reality is indispensable to sustaining a responsive, efficient, and globally competitive legal system.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are advanced to guide policymakers, legal institutions, professional bodies, and practitioners toward an effective and responsible integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in legal research in Nigeria.

A. Establish a Comprehensive Regulatory Framework for AI in Legal Practice

Nigeria should develop a **clear, sector-specific regulatory framework** addressing AI use in legal research and professional practice. This framework should define:

- i. Standards for accuracy and verification of AI-generated outputs,
- ii. Professional liability in cases of AI-related negligence,
- iii. Minimum ethical and technical requirements for AI tools used in legal settings, and
- iv. Accountability mechanisms for AI developers and users.

Such regulation could be developed collaboratively by the National Assembly, the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA), the Body of Benchers, and technology stakeholders.



B. Amend the Rules of Professional Conduct (RPC) to Include Technological Competence

The Rules of Professional Conduct, 2023 should be amended to expressly impose a **duty of technological competence**, similar to the standards in the UK, US, and Canada. Lawyers should be required to:

- i. Understand the capabilities and limitations of AI tools,
- ii. Adequately supervise AI-generated content, and
- iii. Verify all research outputs before reliance in legal proceedings.

This amendment will modernize the ethical framework and ensure accountability in the digital era.

C. Institutional Investment in AI Infrastructure for Courts and Legal Education

The judiciary, law faculties, and research institutions should invest in:

- i. Licensed AI-enabled legal research databases,
- ii. Digital libraries integrated with machine learning search functions,
- iii. AI-based judicial analytics systems, and
- iv. Cloud infrastructure that supports secure and encrypted research processes.

These investments will enhance efficiency, reduce research time, and ensure consistent access to reliable legal materials.

D. Integrate AI Literacy into the Curriculum of Law Faculties and the Nigerian Law School

AI literacy should be incorporated into:

- i. Undergraduate law programmes,
- ii. The Nigerian Law School curriculum,
- iii. Continuing professional development (CPD) programmes, and
- iv. Judicial training institutes.

Topics should include AI ethics, algorithmic bias, digital legal research, machine learning fundamentals, and data protection. This will ensure that graduates and practitioners possess the skills required for modern legal practice.

E. Develop Ethical Guidelines on Confidentiality and Data Protection for AI Use

Given the risks of cloud-based AI systems, the NBA and the Nigerian Data Protection Commission should develop strict guidelines requiring:

- i. Secure encryption of client-sensitive information,
- ii. Prohibition of uploading privileged documents into unsecured AI platforms,



- iii. Local storage requirements for legal databases, and
- iv. Compliance audits for AI vendors.

These guidelines will safeguard client confidentiality and align practice with global data-protection norms.

F. Create a Certification and Accreditation Regime for AI Legal Research Tools

A national accreditation system should be established to certify AI tools used in legal research. Accreditation criteria should assess:

- i. Data accuracy,
- ii. Transparency of algorithms,
- iii. Confidentiality safeguards,
- iv. Bias-prevention mechanisms, and
- v. Compliance with Nigerian data-protection laws.

This ensures that only vetted, reliable AI tools are adopted within the legal system.

G. Promote Human Oversight and Mandatory Verification Standards

AI must serve as a support mechanism, not a substitute, for human judgment. Courts, law firms, and academic institutions should adopt internal policies that require:

- i. Mandatory citation verification,
- ii. Independent review of AI-generated summaries or case extractions,
- iii. Prohibition of submitting AI-generated content without manual validation, and
- iv. Documentation of verification steps taken during research.

This aligns with global best practices and mitigates the risks of AI “hallucination.”

H. Encourage Collaboration Between Legal Institutions and Technology Developers

Local innovation should be harnessed through structured partnerships between:

- i. Universities,
- ii. Tech hubs,
- iii. AI developers,
- iv. Law firms,
- v. The Nigerian Institute of Advanced Legal Studies (NIALS), and
- vi. The judiciary.



Collaborative research will produce context-specific AI tools tailored to Nigerian jurisprudence and legal procedures.

I. Provide Subsidised Access to AI Tools for Public-Interest Lawyers and Government Agencies

To prevent a digital divide in the justice system, the government and donor organisations should subsidise AI access for:

- i. Public defenders,
- ii. Pro bono lawyers,
- iii. Non-governmental organisations engaged in human rights, and
- iv. Judicial and legislative drafting departments.

This will democratise access to reliable legal research tools and enhance justice delivery.

J. Establish a National Centre for AI and Law

A specialized research centre focusing on AI and legal research should be created to:

- i. Conduct empirical studies on AI's impact,
- ii. Audit AI tools used in the legal sector,
- iii. Develop Nigerian legal-tech standards, and
- iv. Provide periodic policy guidance.

Such a centre could be hosted under NIALS or as a joint initiative with universities and the judiciary.

K. Promote Continuous Professional Development (CPD) on AI

Legal practitioners should undergo periodic CPD training on:

- i. Emerging AI technologies,
- ii. Ethical AI usage,
- iii. Cybersecurity,
- iv. Digital evidence, and
- v. Technological risk mitigation.

Mandatory CPD credits on AI will ensure sustained professional competence.

L. Adopt International Best Practices While Maintaining Local Context

Nigeria should benchmark and adapt best practices from the UK, US, Canada, and Singapore, focusing on:



- i. Algorithmic transparency,
- ii. Fairness and non-discrimination principles,
- iii. Human oversight,
- iv. Professional accountability, and
- v. Privacy-by-design standards.

However, implementation must be adapted to Nigeria's unique socioeconomic and infrastructural realities.