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Thank you.

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ADVANCING WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN NIGERIA THROUGH ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE EDUCATION AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT FOR INNOVATION AND LEADERSHIP

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Abstract: The rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI) presents a transformative opportunity to empower women, particularly in Nigeria, where gender disparities in technology persist. This paper explores how AI education and skill development can foster resilience, drive innovation, and promote female leadership in the tech industry. Google form was used to gather data from 50 key stakeholders in AI education, including women who have completed AI-related programs, educators, and program leaders from three (3) institutions, while focus group provided additional insights to support the quantitative analysis using simple percentage and mean rate for data analysis. Results of the findings showed that the most significant challenges are access to resources, lack of mentorship, and gender biases, all of which hinder women from fully participating in AI education, also the key opportunities lie in expanding women-focused programs, increasing collaboration with international organizations, and tapping into the rising demand for AI professionals. To enhance female participation in AI, this paper recommends strengthening policy frameworks, increasing funding for women-focused tech programs, expanding mentorship opportunities, and fostering public-private partnerships. Additionally, integrating gender-sensitive curricula and addressing cultural barriers in STEM education are essential for long-term success. Empowering women through AI is not only a step toward gender equality but also a catalyst for innovation and sustainable development in Nigeria.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, education, empowering women, gender disparities, skill development, leadership

Introduction

In recent years, global conversations around Artificial Intelligence (AI) have become increasingly prominent, as AI continues to transform industries, economies, and everyday life. Despite its vast potential to tackle key global issues, women particularly in developing nations like Nigeria are still notably underrepresented in the AI sector (Ahmed, 2021). A 2020 report by UNESCO highlights the low participation of women in science and technology fields, with the situation being especially critical across Africa. In Nigeria, various challenges such as cultural norms, poor access to quality education, and insufficient infrastructure especially in rural communities further widen the gender gap (Terlau, 2021). Even when women do break into the AI field, they often face persistent barriers, including gender discrimination, limited career advancement opportunities, and a shortage of mentorship support (Women in Tech Nigeria, 2021).

Nigerian women with AI education and skill development can enhance their resilience, spark innovation, and foster leadership within the tech industry. The paper discusses how increasing women's participation in AI not only improves

their socio-economic status but also helps address both local and global challenges through AI-driven solutions. Despite the growing demand for AI professionals, women in Nigeria face several barriers that prevent them from joining the tech workforce (Adediran et al., 2024). These barriers include limited access to AI education, a lack of awareness about AI career opportunities, and deeply rooted cultural stereotypes about women's roles in STEM. Moreover, the absence of policies specifically supporting women in educational and professional spaces continues to widen the gender gap in AI (Yu, 2024). In a country like Nigeria, where unemployment rates are particularly high among women, developing AI skills could be transformative. However, the lack of institutional support and recognition of the importance of empowering women through AI remains a significant challenge. This underscores the need to urgently address gender inequalities in AI and harness its potential as a tool for women's empowerment in Nigeria.

By exploring these differences, this study aimed to explore examine the potential of AI education and skill development in empowering Nigerian women by enhancing their leadership abilities. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Examine the barriers/challenges women face in accessing AI
2. education and technology-related skill development in Nigeria
3. explore the Opportunities Identified by women's empowerment, resilience, and leadership development in Nigeria
4. propose strategies for promoting gender equality and fostering innovation through targeted AI skill development programs for women in Nigeria

Research Questions

The following research questions were based on the research hypotheses.

1. What are the hindrances faced by women in accessing AI education and technology-related skill development in Nigeria?
2. What is the opportunities level identified by women's empowerment, resilience, and leadership development in Nigeria?
3. What strategies encountered by women in promoting gender equality and fostering innovation through targeted AI skill development programs in Nigeria

Several studies have documented the gender gap in the global technology industry. A 2019 UNESCO report on women in STEM reveals that women make up only 28% of the workforce in technology and innovation globally. In Nigeria, the participation of women in STEM education is still low, particularly in AI. According to a 2021 report by the Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics, women represent only 30% of the science and technology workforce, with a further decline in leadership roles. Additionally, research shows that Nigerian women face even greater challenges, such as lack of internet access, societal norms that restrict educational choices, and inadequate female representation in teaching staff in STEM-related fields (Okeke & Ramaila, 2025). On the other hand, there have been notable initiatives that seek to address these issues. Programs like Women in Tech Nigeria, She Codes Africa, and African Women in

Technology have successfully empowered women by providing training, mentorship, and scholarships in various tech fields, including AI. Women in AI-driven innovation as a means to increase diverse perspectives and ensure that AI applications are socially inclusive (World Economic Forum 2020; Weber-Lewerenz & Vasiliu-Feltes 2022).

AI education is increasingly recognized as a key tool for building resilience. A 2022 report by the International Telecommunication Union highlights that women who are trained in emerging technologies like AI enjoy greater economic mobility, enhanced decision-making power, and stronger resilience to societal challenges. As the global demand for AI professionals rises, integrating women into AI education and the tech industry has become a more urgent focus (Pedro et al., 2019). However, the underrepresentation of women, especially in developing nations like Nigeria, remains a major obstacle. The gender gap in the AI field is not just a matter of fairness; it is also a critical issue that impacts sustainable innovation and growth

Literature Review

Gender Disparity in AI and Technology Fields

Gender inequality in tech fields, especially in AI, is a well-documented issue. A 2021 report from the World Economic Forum found that women make up just 22% of the global AI workforce, with an even smaller percentage in leadership roles. This pattern is also evident in Nigeria, where women are underrepresented in STEM education and tech careers (Otutu, 2023). According to data from the Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics (2021) stated that though more Nigerian women are entering higher education, their participation in tech, engineering, and AI programs remains low. Cultural stereotypes, biases, and limited access to technology continue to pose significant challenges for women in Nigeria (Akintola, 2020).

Barriers to Women's Access to AI Education

A major obstacle to women's involvement in AI education is the limited access to resources. Research from UNESCO (2020) reveals a significant gap in the availability of quality STEM education for men and women, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. In Nigeria, cultural norms that prioritize male education over female education worsen this issue (Eboyem, 2024). The shortage of female role models in AI, especially those in leadership roles, also discourages young girls and women from pursuing careers in the field (Eke, 2023). Moreover, financial constraints play a key role in restricting access. Many women, particularly in rural areas of Nigeria, cannot afford the high costs of AI training programs or advanced studies, leaving them excluded from some of the best career prospects in the tech industry (Mohammed & Shehu, 2023).

Initiatives for Empowering Women in AI

Efforts to close the gender gap in AI education are being made through various local and global initiatives (Bashir, 2023). For instance, organizations like Women in Tech Nigeria and She Codes Africa are working to make a difference. She Codes Africa, in particular, offers coding bootcamps and mentorship opportunities for women across Africa, helping them gain the technical skills needed for AI and tech careers.

These programs have been successful in equipping women with the necessary expertise. Additionally, the growing focus on mentorship has played a crucial role in opening doors for women to enter

improve the retention and advancement of women in tech by offering valuable guidance and helping them build professional networks.

Additionally, *African Women in Technology* (2021) *has* launched a series of initiatives that train women in data science, AI, and blockchain technologies. These programs are designed to meet the needs of Nigerian women by focusing on accessible, flexible training that can be accessed remotely, thus overcoming some of the logistical barriers.

Building Resilience through AI Education AI education not only helps women develop technical skills but also builds resilience. The International Telecommunication Union (ITU, 2022) states that equipping women with AI skills enables women to better manage the economic and social challenges they encounter. AI literacy allows women to create solutions for local problems, like improving healthcare access, boosting agricultural productivity, and tackling gender-based violence. By giving women problem-solving abilities, AI education strengthens their capacity to navigate tough situations and drive positive societal change. Furthermore, resilience is also nurtured through participation in AI leadership programs. A study by UN Women (2021) highlighted the positive effect of leadership training on women's confidence and decision-making, particularly in male-dominated areas like AI. By stepping into leadership roles, women can advocate for more inclusive and the AI field (Aderibigbe et al., 2023). Ahmed et al. (2025) found that mentorship programs significantly

diverse policies in tech, leading to broad societal innovation.

Impact of Female Representation in AI

The inclusion of women in AI not only promotes gender equality but also enhances the quality of innovation. Research by *The Brookings Institution* (2020*)* found that gender-diverse teams are more likely to develop innovative solutions, as they bring different perspectives to problem-solving. AI algorithms, if developed by homogeneous groups, are more likely to perpetuate biases that exclude certain demographic groups. A more diverse workforce can ensure that AI systems are designed with a broader range of users in mind, addressing societal needs in a more inclusive manner (Hassan, 2021).

In Nigeria, the impact of increasing female representation in AI could be transformative, with women contributing to the development of AI applications that address critical issues like healthcare access, education, and gender equality. As AI adoption continues to expand across the continent, fostering diversity within the sector is essential for ensuring that AI technologies serve all populations equitably (Ahmed, 2021).

Methodology

This study adopts a descriptive qualitative research design, combining a systematic literature review with case study analysis to explore the status of women in AI education and the challenges they face in Nigeria. The literature review draws

from academic articles, government publications, and institutional reports, while in-depth case studies of successful AI initiatives targeting women such as those led by Women in Tech Nigeria, AI for Good, and select universities offer practical examples of empowerment through technology. Primary data was collected via Google Forms from 50 key stakeholders, including female graduates of AI programs, educators, and program coordinators across three institutions, with responses analyzed using simple percentage techniques. To enrich the findings, secondary data from global bodies like UNESCO and the World Bank was incorporated to contextualize the broader landscape of digital inclusion. Reliability of qualitative data was ensured through careful transcription and participant validation, while focus group questionnaires provided additional insights to support the quantitative analysis.

Data Analysis and Discussions of Findings

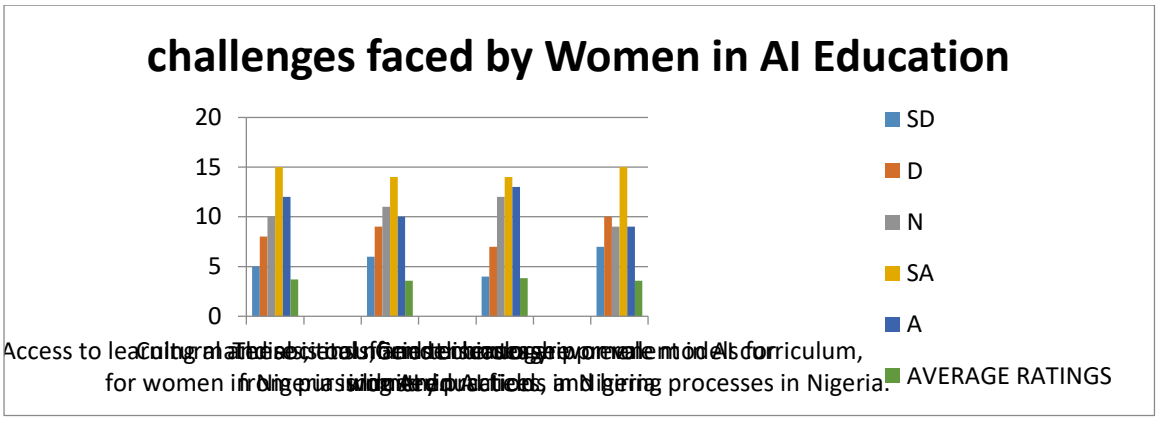
To present the findings based on the data structure and analysis you have, we would draw insights from the data table across several key themes.

Research questions One: What are the barriers/challenges women face in accessing AI education and technology-related skill development in Nigeria?

Area	Statement/Factor	SD (1)	D (2)	N (3)	A (4)	SA (5)	Average Rating
Challenges Faced							
1. Limited access to AI resources	Access to learning materials, tools, and technology for women in Nigeria is limited.	5	8	10	15	12	3.70
2. Societal barriers	Cultural and societal norms discourage women from pursuing AI education.	6	9	11	14	10	3.58
3. Lack of mentorship	There is insufficient mentorship or role models for women in AI fields in Nigeria.	4	7	12	14	13	3.82
4. Gender biases in AI	Gender biases are prevalent in AI curriculum, industry practices, and hiring processes in Nigeria.	7	10	9	15	9	3.56

Source: 2025

Figure 1: Challenges faced by Women in AI Education



The table above indicates a significant portion of respondents (27/50) agreed or strongly agreed that access to resources is limited, this challenge has a relatively high average rating of 3.70, indicating a notable barrier. Cultural norms also pose a challenge for women in pursuing AI education, as reflected by 24/50 respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing. Average rating: 3.58; lack of mentorship was seen as a key challenge, with 27/50 agreeing. Average rating: 3.82; while gender biases in education and the workplace were reported by many respondents, with an average rating of 3.56, indicating that this is a moderate but significant issue

Research Objectives 2: What are the Opportunities Identified by women's empowerment, resilience, and leadership development in Nigeria?

Table 2: Opportunities in AI Education

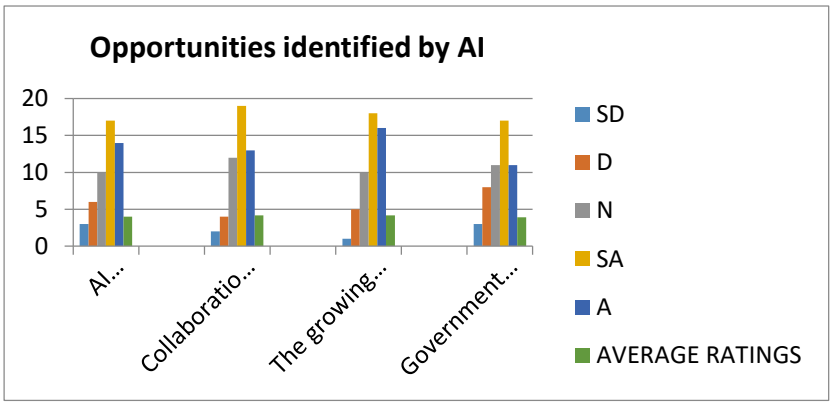
Area	Statement/Factor	SD (1)	D (2)	N (3)	A (4)	SA (5)	Average Rating
Opportunities Identified							
1. Increasing women-focused programs	AI educational initiatives targeting women, such as those by Women in Tech Nigeria and AI for Good, are expanding.	3	6	10	17	14	4.02
2. Collaboration with international organizations	Collaboration between Nigerian organizations and international AI groups provides new opportunities for women.	2	4	12	19	13	4.16
3. Rise in AI career demand	The growing demand for AI professionals in Nigeria offers significant career opportunities for women entering the field.	1	5	10	18	16	4.18

4. Government support	Government initiatives supporting women in tech provide a conducive environment for growth.	3	8	11	17	11	3.92

Source, 2025

The above table above indicates significant portion of respondents (31/50) agreed or strongly agreed that women-focused AI programs are growing, with an average rating of 4.02 indicating strong support for such initiatives, collaboration with international organizations respondents highly value international partnerships as reflected by 32/50 respondents agreeing or strongly agree, with an average rating of 4.16; the demand for AI professionals is seen as a key opportunity as reflected by 34/50 respondents agreeing or strongly agree, with the highest average rating of 4.18 while government support has positive as reflected by 28/50 respondents agreeing or strongly agree with average rating: 3.92 therefore government support is considered a solid but not overwhelming opportunity.

Figure 2: Opportunities in AI Education



Research Objective 3: What is the strategies for promoting gender equality and fostering innovation through targeted AI skill development programs for women in Nigeria?

Table 3: Promoting Gender Equality and Innovation

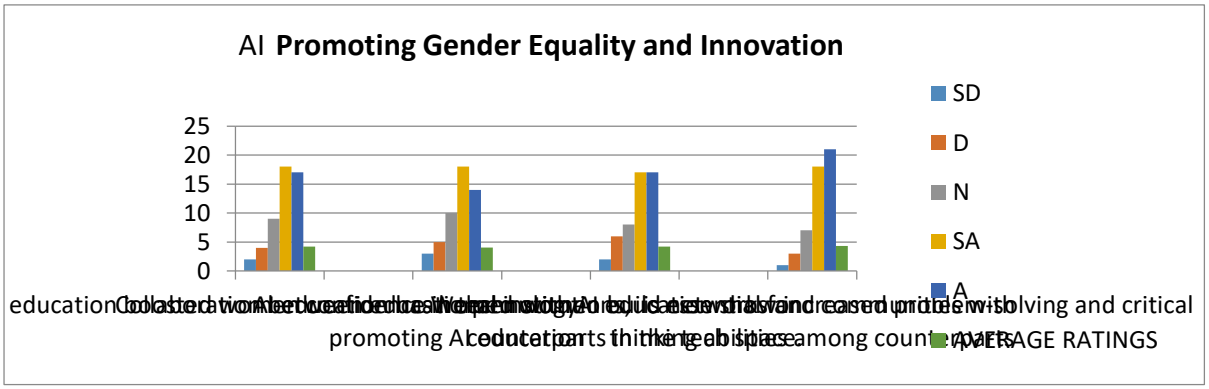
Area	**Statement/Factor**	**SD (1)**	**D (2)**	**N (3)**	**A (4)**	**SA (5)**	**Average Rating**
1. Increased confidence	AI education boosted women confidence in technology	2	4	9	18	17	4.20
2 collaboration opportunities	Collaboration between educational institutions, businesses, and NGOs is essential for promoting AI education for women in Nigeria	3	5	10	18	14	4.04

3. Networking and community building	AI education has helped women build networks and communities with counterparts in the tech space.	2	6	8	17	17	4.18
4. Improved problem-solving skills	Women with AI education show increased problem-solving and critical thinking abilities among counterparts	1	3	7	18	21	4.32

Source: 2025

The above table above indicates Many respondents reported that AI education boosted their confidence in technology, with an average rating of 4.20, I education led to better job opportunities for women, with a strong average rating of 4.04; networking opportunities were also highlighted as empowering, with an average rating of 4.18 while the development of problem-solving skills through AI education was highly valued, with the highest average rating of 4.32.

Figure 3: Promoting Gender Equality and Innovation



Result of Findings

The results of the study showed that the most significant challenges are access to resources, lack of mentorship, and gender biases, all of which hinder women from fully participating in AI education. Also the key opportunities lie in expanding women-focused programs, increasing collaboration with international organizations, and tapping into the rising demand for AI professionals, while empowerment outcomes include significant gains in confidence, job opportunities, and networking, with improved problem-solving skills being one of the most notable impacts.

Conclusion

In conclusion the empowerment of women in Nigeria through AI education is not just an opportunity; it is a necessity for fostering innovation, leadership, and resilience. Although Nigerian women face several challenges in accessing AI education, there are significant efforts being made through both local and international programs that are helping to bridge the gender gap in AI. Investing in AI education for women can have transformative effects, not only for the women themselves but for Nigerian society as a whole, fostering greater innovation and economic development. The study underscores the importance of policy changes, mentorship

programs, and community-driven initiatives to further empower women in AI and tech. A more inclusive AI sector will result in more diverse perspectives, more sustainable solutions, and the long-term economic empowerment of women in Nigeria.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are hereby stated to:

1. Ensure women in tech to collaborate with educational institutions and policy-makers to integrate AI and emerging tech into formal education while actively encouraging female participation through scholarships, mentorship, and awareness campaigns.
2. Create a mentorship and leadership development program connecting young women with female AI professionals, entrepreneurs, and researchers across Nigeria and globally.
3. Set up community-based AI training centers specifically targeting women in rural and peri-urban communities, offering accessible courses in machine learning, data science, robotics, and digital literacy

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