

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN LEGAL PRACTICE: THREAT OR TOOL FOR THE FUTURE LAWYER IN NIGERIA?

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Abstract

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is rapidly transforming industries worldwide, and the legal profession is no exception. From predictive analytics in litigation to contract automation and document review, AI is redefining how legal services are delivered. However, this technological evolution has provoked significant debate, particularly in developing countries like Nigeria, where infrastructure, regulation, and legal education are still evolving. This paper interrogates whether AI is a threat or a tool for the future Nigerian lawyer. It examines the global and local impact of AI in legal practice, explores its benefits and risks, and critically evaluates the preparedness of the Nigerian legal system for such disruption. While AI holds immense potential to enhance efficiency and access to justice, it also poses challenges regarding ethical compliance, job displacement, data protection, and professional identity. Through a socio-legal analysis, the paper argues that AI, if properly harnessed, is more of a tool than a threat offering Nigerian lawyers an opportunity to modernize legal practice. The paper concludes with policy and practical recommendations for integrating AI ethically and effectively into Nigeria's legal sector.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Legal Practice, Nigeria, Future Lawyer, Legal Technology, Legal Ethics, Legal Automation, Access to Justice

1.1 Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is no longer a concept confined to science fiction or futuristic

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speculation; it is now embedded in everyday technologies and increasingly shaping the way we live, work, and interact. In the legal field, AI is gradually revolutionizing the delivery of legal services streamlining legal research, automating document review, predicting case outcomes, and even drafting contracts. This shift has sparked a critical debate across jurisdictions: will AI complement legal practice or displace traditional lawyers altogether?

Globally, law firms and courts are adopting AI tools to improve efficiency, reduce cost, and enhance access to justice. AI-powered platforms like ROSS Intelligence, which was built on IBM's Watson, have enabled lawyers to conduct legal research using natural language queries.¹ In the United Kingdom, tools like CaseText and Lexis+ AI are reshaping legal analytics and client advisory services.² Meanwhile, courts in countries like the United States and China have piloted AI systems for case triaging, sentencing recommendations, and digital case management.³ These developments indicate that AI is no longer a theoretical possibility it is a present and evolving reality. In Nigeria, however, the integration of AI in legal practice remains minimal. While some innovative law firms like Omaplex Law Firm, SPA Ajibade & Co, and Giwa-Osagie & Co are embracing technology in case management and virtual court appearances, AI-driven systems are yet to become mainstream tools of advocacy or legal research.⁴ Concerns range from technological illiteracy, infrastructural limitations, regulatory gaps, to ethical dilemmas. These realities place Nigerian lawyers at a crossroads: to evolve with AI or risk being left behind. Through a critical analysis, this study presents a balanced perspective, drawing on comparative insights from jurisdictions such as the United States and the United Kingdom, while anchoring the argument within Nigeria's legal context. This paper critically explores whether AI represents a threat to or a tool for the future lawyer in Nigeria. It examines global trends in AI adoption in the legal sector and reflects on Nigeria's current readiness to embrace these innovations. Drawing from doctrinal, socio-legal, and comparative perspectives, the paper aims to: first, understand the potentials and pitfalls of AI for legal professionals. Second, examine the legal and ethical implications of AI use in Nigeria's legal system, and last, recommend a policy framework for AI integration that promotes both innovation and professionalism.

2.1 Conceptual Clarification and Theoretical Framework

To properly assess the implications of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in legal practice, it is necessary to define and clarify key terms and explore the theoretical perspectives that underpin the discourse

¹ ROSS Intelligence, 'Legal Research Powered by AI' (ROSS Intelligence, 2020) [<https://rossintelligence.com>]; (<https://rossintelligence.com>) accessed 6 July 2025.

² LexisNexis, 'Lexis+ AI: A New Era in Legal Research' (LexisNexis UK, 2023) <https://www.lexisnexis.co.uk/latest-news/lexis-plus-ai> accessed on the 6th of July 2025.

³ Michael Guihot, Anne Matthew and Nicolas Suzor, 'Artificial Intelligence and the Rule of Law: The Need for Regulation' (2017) 44(4) *Monash University Law Review* 103, 106–110.

⁴ Oyetola Muiyiwa Atoyebe SAN, 'AI and the Future of Legal Practice in Nigeria' (2022) *The Gravitas Review of Business and Property Law* [<https://gravitasreview.com/ai-and-the-future-of-legal-practice-in-nigeria/>] (<https://gravitasreview.com/ai-and-the-future-of-legal-practice-in-nigeria/>) accessed on the 6th of July 2025.

on law and technology. This section sets the foundation for understanding the nature, scope, and significance of AI as it relates to legal systems, particularly within the Nigerian context.

2.2 What Is Artificial Intelligence?

Artificial Intelligence refers to the simulation of human intelligence in machines that are programmed to think, learn, and make decisions. According to the European Commission, AI encompasses systems that can “perceive their environment and take actions autonomously or semi-autonomously to achieve specific goals.”⁵ AI systems operate through various technologies including machine learning (ML), natural language processing (NLP), neural networks, and deep learning.

2.2.1 Key Legal AI Terminologies

- LegalTech: Technology used to provide legal services and support legal work.⁶
- Machine Learning: A subset of AI where systems improve through data exposure without being explicitly programmed.⁷
- Natural Language Processing: AI's ability to understand and interpret human language.⁸

Legal AI specifically refers to software applications that perform tasks traditionally carried out by lawyers such as legal research, contract analysis, discovery in litigation, case prediction, and document drafting.⁹ These tools often rely on big data, algorithms, and language processing to analyze legal texts and generate insights with greater speed and precision than humans.

2.3 Types of AI in Legal Practice

AI in law is not monolithic, not rigid. It spans a range of functionalities, including:

- i. Predictive Analytics: Used to forecast litigation outcomes based on historical data (e.g., Lex Machina).
- ii. Document Automation: AI-powered tools like DoNotPay can generate legal documents or even challenge traffic tickets.¹⁰

⁵ European Commission, ‘What Is Artificial Intelligence?’ (2021) [<https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/artificial-intelligence>] accessed through the internet on the 6th of July 2025.

⁶ Andrew Arruda, ‘What is LegalTech?’ (Ross Intelligence, 2021) <https://www.rossintelligence.com/blog/what-is-legaltech>; accessed 5th July, 2025.

⁷ Tom Mitchell, Machine Learning (McGraw-Hill 1997).

⁸ Daniel Jurafsky and James H Martin, Speech and Language Processing (3rd edn, Prentice Hall 2021).

⁹ Kevin D. Ashley, Artificial Intelligence and Legal Analytics: New Tools for Law Practice in the Digital Age (Cambridge University Press 2017) 23.

¹⁰ DoNotPay, ‘The World’s First Robot Lawyer’ <https://donotpay.com> accessed on the 7th of July 2025.

- iii. Legal Research: Natural language AI platforms like ROSS Intelligence and Lexis+ AI assist in finding relevant case law quickly.
- iv. Chatbots & Virtual Legal Assistants: Used for client intake, triage, and FAQs in law firms.¹¹

2.4 Key Related Concepts

- Legal Technology (LegalTech): encompasses all technology used to support legal services, including case management, billing, and e-filing, not just AI.
- Algorithmic Justice refers to decision-making by machines in legal contexts, raising concerns about transparency and accountability.
- Legal Disruption: a term used to describe how emerging technologies challenge traditional legal processes and business models¹².

2.5 Theoretical Frameworks

To analyze the relationship between AI and the legal profession, several theoretical lenses may be employed:

1. Technological Determinism: This theory suggests that technological innovations drive social and institutional change, often beyond human control. Applied here, it implies that AI will inevitably reshape the legal profession whether lawyers are prepared or not.¹³
2. Socio-Legal Theory: This perspective examines law as a social institution that interacts with broader societal forces including technology. It argues that law is not immune to technological influences, and any innovation must be viewed in terms of its socio-cultural, political, and economic effects.¹⁴
3. Regulatory Theory: This theory concerns how emerging technologies can be regulated to balance innovation and accountability. It emphasizes the need for proactive legal frameworks to manage AI's risks in a way that protects public interest.¹⁵

¹¹ American Bar Association, '2023 Legal Technology Survey Report' (ABA, 2023) [<https://www.americanbar.org/groups/law/practice/publications/techreport/2023/>] accessed on the 6th of July 2025.

¹² Susskind, Richard, *The End of Lawyers? Rethinking the Nature of Legal Services* (Oxford University Press 2010) 88–95.

¹³ Langdon Winner, 'Do Artifacts Have Politics?' (1980) 109 *Daedalus* 121.

¹⁴ Roger Cotterrell, *Law, Culture and Society: Legal Ideas in the Mirror of Social Theory* (Ashgate 2006).

¹⁵ Karen Yeung, Andrew Howes and Ganna Pogrebna, 'AI Governance by Human Rights–Centred Design, Deliberation and Oversight: An End to Ethics Washing' in Markus D. Dubber, Frank Pasquale and Sunit Das (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of AI Ethics* (Oxford University Press 2020).

3.1 The Integration of AI in Global Legal Practice

Artificial Intelligence has rapidly evolved from a niche technological concept into a functional tool used across various legal systems worldwide. From litigation prediction to intelligent contract analysis, countries with advanced legal infrastructures have embraced AI to enhance access to justice, improve legal research, reduce costs, and increase efficiency in both litigation and transactional work. This article provides a comparative analysis of how AI has been integrated into legal practice in selected jurisdictions namely, the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and China highlighting models that Nigeria can draw lessons from.

A. United States:

The United States is a leading jurisdiction in the deployment of AI within legal systems. Law firms and courts extensively use AI-based platforms such as Lex Machina, ROSS Intelligence (before it was shut down in 2021 due to a lawsuit), and Casetext's CoCounsel. These tools help in predicting case outcomes, legal research, and document review. For example, Lex Machina, a litigation analytics platform, enables lawyers to assess how a judge has ruled in similar cases, helping to develop effective case strategies.¹⁶

American courts have also experimented with risk assessment algorithms, such as COMPAS (Correctional Offender Management Profiling for Alternative Sanctions), which assists in bail and sentencing decisions though not without controversy, due to issues of algorithmic bias and transparency.¹⁷ Legal education in the U.S. is adapting as well. Law schools such as Stanford, Harvard, and Georgetown now offer courses on Law and Artificial Intelligence, showing an institutional commitment to preparing future lawyers for a tech-driven profession.¹⁸

B. United Kingdom

In the UK, technology is increasingly being embraced in legal practice, particularly in commercial and corporate legal services. Tools like Lexis+ AI, Luminance, and RAVN Systems are used to automate contract review, due diligence, and compliance analysis.¹⁹ The Solicitors Regulation

¹⁶ ex Machina, 'Legal Analytics' [<https://lexmachina.com>] (<https://lexmachina.com>) accessed through the internet on the 8th of July 2025.

¹⁷ Julia Angwin et al, 'Machine Bias: There's Software Used Across the Country to Predict Future Criminals. And It's Biased Against Blacks' (ProPublica, 2016) <https://www.propublica.org/article/machine-bias-risk-assessments-in-criminal-sentencing> accessed through the internet on the 8th of July 2025.

¹⁸ Stanford Law School, 'Law and Policy Lab: AI and the Law' [<https://law.stanford.edu/policy-lab/ai-and-law/>] (<https://law.stanford.edu/policy-lab/ai-and-law/>) accessed on the 8th of July 2025.

¹⁹ Luminance, 'Legal Document Review Powered by AI' [<https://www.luminance.com>] accessed on the 13th of July, 2025.

Authority (SRA) and the Law Society of England and Wales have both published guidance on the ethical use of AI, stressing principles like transparency, accountability, and non-discrimination.²⁰ The UK Supreme Court and Court of Appeal have also transitioned into digitized case filing and management systems, creating a foundation for future AI integration into judicial processes.

C. Canada

Canada has embraced AI notably through its judiciary. In Ontario, the Superior Court of Justice has tested AI tools for document review and case scheduling. The Canadian Judicial Council is actively researching the ethical implications of AI in the courtroom. Meanwhile, law firms such as Osler, Hoskin & Harcourt LLP and Blake, Cassels & Graydon LLP have integrated AI into litigation support and M&A review.²¹ The Canadian Bar Association released a report titled “AI and the Legal Profession”, encouraging proactive regulation and capacity-building for Canadian lawyers.²²

D. China:

China leads in the integration of AI within its court system. The Hangzhou Internet Court and Beijing Internet Court use AI judges and blockchain evidence systems for online dispute resolution, particularly in IP and e-commerce-related cases. In some instances, chatbots known as “robot judges” can handle basic judicial tasks, including issuing rulings on small claims without human intervention.²³ The Chinese government's Artificial Intelligence Development Plan actively promotes AI across sectors, including the legal system. However, concerns persist regarding lack of judicial independence and state surveillance embedded within AI tools.²⁴

E. Singapore

Singapore has been globally recognized for its strategic approach to legal technology integration. Through its Legal Technology Vision, the country launched initiatives like “FLIP” (Future Law Innovation Programme) to foster legal innovation among firms and start-ups.²⁵ The Singapore Academy of Law has supported AI-driven platforms like Intelllex, a legal research tool using machine learning to improve search relevance and classification²⁶. The judiciary also piloted the

²⁰ Law Society of England and Wales, ‘Technology and Law: A Framework for Ethics’ (2022) [<https://www.lawsociety.org.uk/topics/research/technology-and-law-a-framework-for-ethics>] accessed on the 13th of July, 2025.

²¹ Osler, Hoskin & Harcourt LLP, ‘Legal Technology & Innovation’ [<https://www.osler.com/en/services/innovative-services>] accessed on the 13th of July, 2025.

²² <https://www.cba.org/resources/practice-tools/ethics-of-artificial-intelligence-for-the-legal-practitioner/3-guidelines-relating-to-use/>; accessed on the 14th of July, 2025.

²³ <https://iacajournal.org/articles/10.36745/ijca.367>, accessed on the 13th of July, 2025.

²⁴ Graham Webster, ‘China’s AI Development Plan’ (New America, 2017) [<https://www.newamerica.org/cyber-security-initiative/digichina/blog/full-translation-chinas-new-generation-artificial-intelligence-development-plan-2017/>] accessed on the 13th of July, 2025.

²⁵ Singapore Ministry of Law, Legal Technology Vision (2018).

²⁶ Intelllex, Smart Legal Research Platform <https://www.intelllex.com.>, accessed on the 17th day of July, 2025.

use of AI in sentencing for traffic offences, ensuring consistency and reducing judicial workload.²⁷ Furthermore, Singapore's Ministry of Law supports regulatory sandboxes that allow legal tech start-ups to test AI tools in a controlled environment. This balance of innovation and oversight has made Singapore a leader in AI legal integration in Southeast Asia²⁸.

F. South Africa

As one of Africa's leading legal systems, South Africa is gradually embracing AI in its legal practice. Law firms are starting to adopt contract review AI tools like Luminance and Kira Systems to streamline due diligence and document analysis.²⁹ These tools reduce turnaround times and increase efficiency, particularly in corporate law. Universities and think tanks in South Africa are also driving academic research into the legal and ethical dimensions of AI. The University of Pretoria's Centre for AI and Digital Policy is notable for contributing African perspectives on legal AI governance.³⁰ However, broader AI adoption in South Africa faces infrastructural and policy challenges, including limited access to digitized legal data and concerns over fairness in automated systems.³¹ Despite these barriers, South Africa's progressive constitutional culture provides a strong foundation for responsible AI development in law.

Across these jurisdictions, the integration of AI into legal practice has demonstrated significant benefits, ranging from predictive analytics to smart justice delivery. Each country's approach reflects its technological maturity, regulatory framework, and commitment to innovation or oversight. For Nigeria, the diversity in these models offers a valuable comparative framework for AI adoption that aligns with local realities while aiming for global best practices.

G. Lessons for Nigeria

These jurisdictions demonstrate varying levels of AI integration driven by supportive policy environments, significant investment in legal technology, and a clear regulatory approach. Nigeria can draw key lessons from these global experiences:

- I. Encourage legal education reform, introducing AI law courses in Nigerian law faculties.
- II. Develop ethical guidelines on AI use in practice and court systems, inspired by the SRA and Canadian Bar models.
- III. Invest in pilot AI projects within high-volume courts (commercial or family courts), to reduce case backlogs and test technological efficacy.

²⁷ Supreme Court of Singapore, Pilot Sentencing Tool Project, 2020.

²⁸ LawTech.Asia, 'Singapore's Legal Tech Regulatory Sandbox' (2022).

²⁹ Kira Systems, 'Client Case Studies in South Africa', 2021.

³⁰ Centre for AI and Digital Policy, University of Pretoria.

³¹ J. Louw, 'AI Ethics and Access to Justice in South Africa' (2023) 38 SAJHR 84.

4.1 The Rise of AI in Nigerian Legal Practice

While the global legal community has seen a significant shift towards the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into law, Nigeria has only just begun to explore its potential. Though having recently come into existence, there are indicators that the Nigerian legal ecosystem is slowly adopting AI-driven tools in both litigation and corporate practice.

4.2 AI in the Nigerian Judiciary

Nigeria's judiciary has experimented with technology-driven reforms, particularly through the implementation of electronic filing systems and virtual court sittings, a development hastened by the COVID-19 pandemic³². Some state judiciaries, notably Lagos and Rivers, have implemented e-judiciary platforms, but these platforms do not yet integrate advanced AI functionalities such as predictive analytics or AI-based judgment analysis. Nonetheless, the move toward digitization lays the groundwork for future AI integration.

4.3 AI Tools in Law Firms

A few forward-thinking Nigerian law firms are beginning to utilize AI-enabled legal research platforms like LawPavilion, Primsol, and Legalpedia. These tools provide judgment search, citation tracking, and statutory analysis features. While they are not AI in the strictest sense, recent upgrades increasingly incorporate machine learning features, such as automated case summarization and citation suggestions.

4.4 Legal Education and AI Awareness

Legal education in Nigeria has yet to embrace AI in its curriculum. The Nigerian Law School and many university law faculties do not offer courses in legal technology or artificial intelligence, creating a knowledge gap among future lawyers. However, private institutions and legal tech hubs (Innovation Law Club Africa and the Nigerian Bar Association's Section on Business Law) have begun offering workshops and webinars introducing practitioners to AI in law.

4.5 Challenges Facing AI Adoption in Nigeria

Despite pockets of progress, several obstacles remain. These include low digital literacy among legal practitioners, poor internet infrastructure, limited funding for legal tech startups, and the absence of a national legal technology policy. Moreover, there is no clear regulatory guidance on

³² <https://www.lawjournal.digital/jour/article/view/547>; accessed on the 14th of July, 2025.

the ethical use of AI in legal practice, leaving many practitioners unsure of how far they can rely on such tools.

4.6 EMERGING OPPORTUNITIES

With the increasing volume of litigation, delays in judicial process, and growing demand for efficiency, AI presents a valuable opportunity for Nigerian legal stakeholders. If appropriately harnessed, it can support faster document review, streamline case preparation, and improve access to justice, especially in underserved regions. However, the adoption of legal technology remains low compared to global standards due to limited digital infrastructure, poor funding of judiciary systems, lawyer skepticism and fear of job displacement, and lack of a clear regulatory framework guiding AI use in law.³³

4.7 Threats Posed By AI to Nigerian Lawyers

While artificial intelligence offers notable promise, it also introduces a range of profound challenges to the Nigerian legal profession. Many practitioners perceive AI as a disruptive force that threatens both the traditional structure of legal services and the human element of justice.

1. Job Displacement and De-skilling

One of the most widely discussed fears is that AI could replace junior lawyers and paralegals. As AI-powered platforms like ROSS Intelligence and Lexis+ AI become more capable of handling tasks like legal research and contract review, the entry-level functions once performed by young lawyers are being automated. In Nigeria, where thousands of law graduates are churned out yearly, this poses a growing employment threat.³⁴ Furthermore, AI may de-skill lawyers, especially where firms over-rely on technology for analytical tasks. In countries like the UK and US, junior lawyers are already being redeployed to non-traditional legal tech roles, signaling a shift in how legal skills are valued.³⁵

2. Erosion of Human Judgment and Advocacy

AI lacks moral reasoning, empathy, and discretion qualities central to legal advocacy and dispute resolution.³⁶ While AI can process large volumes of case law or suggest outcomes based on precedent, it cannot weigh human motivations or deliver persuasive argumentation in court. In Nigeria, where customary law and discretion often play significant roles, this is a fundamental limitation.

³³ LegalTech Adoption in Africa: Nigeria's Journey' Legal Business Africa (2022) <https://legalbusinessafrica.com>; accessed on the 10th of July, 2025.

³⁴ <https://caseradar.ai/news/68708caca556d17deff68f2c>, accessed on the 14th of July, 2025.

³⁵ Susskind R, *Tomorrow's Lawyers: An Introduction to Your Future*. (2nd edn, Oxford University Press 2017).

³⁶ Casey A and Niblett A, 'The Death of Rules and Standards' (2020) 92 *NYU Law Review* 1.

3. Ethical and Regulatory Dilemmas

AI in law raises complex ethical issues. For example, can a lawyer rely on an AI-generated opinion that turns out to be wrong? If yes, who bears responsibility? The lawyer? The developer? This question of legal liability remains unanswered in most jurisdictions, including Nigeria.³⁷ Moreover, the Nigerian Rules of Professional Conduct (RPC) do not yet account for AI-generated legal work. For instance, Rule 14(1) emphasizes that a lawyer must act competently, yet it is unclear how this standard applies when AI is used in delivering such services.³⁸

4. Privacy and Data Security Risks

AI systems often require access to large volumes of data to function effectively. In Nigeria, where data protection laws are still maturing, this raises concerns over the unauthorized processing of sensitive legal information. Although the Nigeria Data Protection Act (NDPA) 2023 provides a framework, its enforcement remains weak³⁹. Legaltech platforms that rely on cloud storage or offshore servers may inadvertently expose client information to foreign surveillance or cyberattacks⁴⁰.

5. Widening the Justice Gap

AI tools are expensive to build and maintain, which means that well-funded law firms or elite institutions are more likely to benefit from them. This may further widen the access-to-justice gap in Nigeria, where rural communities and underfunded legal aid systems already face barriers⁴¹.

5.1 AI AS A TOOL FOR ENHANCING LEGAL PRACTICE

Despite the concerns AI presents, it actually offers enormous opportunities to transform the Nigerian legal profession. From enhancing efficiency to expanding access to justice, AI has the potential to revolutionize how legal services are delivered.

5.1.1 ENHANCING LEGAL RESEARCH AND DRAFTING

AI tools like LawPavilion, LexisNexis, and Westlaw have revolutionised legal research by making it faster, more comprehensive, and precise. Nigerian platforms such as LawPavilion and Primsol now integrate machine learning features that help lawyers identify relevant precedents, statutes, and even generate automatic case summaries⁴². These tools help lawyers reduce hours of manual

³⁷ Eze C, 'Legal Liability for AI Errors in Legal Practice' (2023) 5(2) *Nigerian Journal of Tech and Law* 22–37.

³⁸ Rules of Professional Conduct for Legal Practitioners, 2007, Rule 14(1).

³⁹ Nigeria Data Protection Act, 2023.

⁴⁰ Olatunji O, 'Cloud Computing and the Protection of Legal Data in Nigeria' (2022) *Nigerian Bar Journal* 18(3) 45–62.

⁴¹ Okonkwo J, 'Legal Technology and Access to Justice in Nigeria' (2021) *African Journal of Law and ICT* 4(1) 66–78.

⁴² LawPavilion, AI Features for Nigerian Lawyers (2024) [<https://lawpavilion.com>] accessed on the 15th of July, 2025.

research and minimize human error. Contract review software like, Kira Systems and Legal Robot, commonly used in Europe and the United States automatically flag inconsistent clauses, missing terms, or high-risk language.⁴³ Though these are not yet widely adopted in Nigeria, global trends suggest they will become increasingly relevant, especially for corporate legal practice.

5.1.2 Predictive Analytics and Case Outcome Forecasting

AI also provides tools for predictive legal analytics, enabling lawyers to anticipate case outcomes based on historical data. In the U.S., platforms like Lex Machina use AI to analyze court records and reveal patterns in judicial behaviour⁴⁴. If similar platforms were developed in Nigeria, lawyers could use them to assess litigation risks, make more informed decisions about settlements, or select favourable jurisdictions.

5.1.3 Automating Routine Legal Tasks

AI is particularly powerful in automating repetitive legal functions such as compliance checks, client onboarding, billing, and due diligence⁴⁵. This automation reduces operational costs and allows legal professionals to redirect their energy towards more strategic tasks. Document automation tools can generate standardised contracts or court forms in minutes—a major efficiency boost for busy practitioners.

5.1.4 Enhancing Access to Justice

AI holds enormous promise in extending legal services to underserved populations. In the U.S., the AI-powered chatbot DoNotPay offers free legal assistance on issues like parking tickets, landlord disputes, and subscription cancellations⁴⁶. If adapted in Nigeria—possibly through platforms that support Pidgin English or local dialects—AI could democratise legal information, helping citizens who cannot afford traditional legal services.

5.1.5 Supporting Judicial Reforms

Nigeria's judiciary continues to struggle with case backlogs and procedural delays. AI could assist courts with case scheduling, backlog tracking, and generating data for policy reform.⁴⁷ For instance, algorithmic tools can be deployed to sort cases by urgency or category, improving time management in courts, particularly in high - volume states like Lagos and Rivers.

⁴³ Surden H, 'Machine Learning and Law' (2014) 89 *Washington Law Review* 87–115.

⁴⁴ Lex Machina, Legal Analytics Platform <https://lexmachina.com>, accessed t on the 15th of July, 2025.

⁴⁵ Remus D and Levy F, 'Can Robots Be Lawyers?' (2016) 30 *Georgetown Journal of Legal Ethics* 501.

⁴⁶ DoNotPay, The World's First Robot Lawyer <https://donotpay.com>

⁴⁷ Chukwuemeka J, 'Technology and the Future of the Nigerian Judiciary' (2022) *Journal of Law, Policy & Technology* 9(1) 34–49.

5.1.6 Increasing Professional Competence

By automating routine tasks, AI allows lawyers to focus more on creative problem-solving, negotiation, and client advocacy. This repositioning shifts AI from a perceived threat to a collaborative tool.⁴⁸ Rather than replacing lawyers, AI becomes a digital partner that augments human judgment and enhances client service.

5.1.7 Cost Reduction

Automating routine legal tasks reduces overhead costs, allowing firms to offer more competitive billing models, especially for startups and SMEs.⁴⁹

6.1 Regulatory and Ethical Frameworks For AI In Law

As Artificial Intelligence (AI) continues to permeate legal systems worldwide, it becomes crucial for Nigeria to adopt a regulatory and ethical framework that balances innovation and accountability. The current legal environment in Nigeria lacks explicit laws or ethical directives that address AI's implications in legal practice.

6.1.1 Absence of Specific AI Regulation in Nigeria

At present, Nigeria has no single piece of legislation that governs the use of AI in legal services. The Nigeria Data Protection Act 2023 offers general rules on privacy and data processing but fails to provide rules for algorithmic transparency, automated legal advice, or liability allocation for AI errors.⁵⁰ In addition, foundational laws such as the Legal Practitioners Act⁵¹ and the Rules of Professional Conduct for Legal Practitioners⁵² do not contemplate technology-assisted legal work. As such, ethical obligations like client consent, duty of competence, and confidentiality become vague in the context of AI use.

6.1.2 Ethical Dilemmas and Responsibility Gaps

A fundamental ethical concern is who bears liability when AI gives wrong advice, the lawyer or the software developer? Since most AI legal tools operate as black boxes, it is difficult to trace errors to human actors⁵³. Lawyers must also grapple with whether they are obligated to inform clients when AI was used in creating documents, reviewing contracts, or preparing legal opinions. Another concern is unauthorised legal practice. If an AI chatbot answers a client's legal question

⁴⁸ Susskind R, *Online Courts and the Future of Justice* (Oxford University Press 2019).

⁴⁹ Susan Nevelow Mart, 'The Algorithm as a Human Artifact: Implications for Legal Analytics' (2017) 109 *Law Library Journal* 387.

⁵⁰ Nigeria Data Protection Act 2023.

⁵¹ Legal Practitioners Act, Cap L11, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria 2004.

⁵² Rules of Professional Conduct for Legal Practitioners 2007.

⁵³ Eze C, 'Legal Liability for AI Errors in Legal Practice' (2023) *Nigerian Journal of Tech and Law* 5(2) 22–37.

without human supervision, this could violate Nigeria's licensing rules and standards for professional conduct.

6.1.3 Global Best Practices and Comparative Models

Internationally, several jurisdictions are responding to these ethical and regulatory gaps. The European Union has proposed the Artificial Intelligence Act, which classifies legal AI tools as high-risk technologies and mandates clear human oversight, risk management, and data documentation.⁵⁴ In the United States, the American Bar Association (ABA) issued Formal Opinion 498, stating that lawyers must remain competent in the technology they use and supervise AI tools to ensure legal accuracy⁵⁵. Similarly, the UK Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA) published a report stressing that AI should support not replace legal professionals, and that the duty of care still rests with the lawyer⁵⁶.

D. Proposals for Nigeria

Nigeria can take the following regulatory and ethical steps to ensure the responsible use of AI in law:

1. Guidelines from the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA): The NBA should issue ethical guidelines for AI use, covering client consent, transparency, and accountability.
2. Legislative Framework: The National Assembly could propose a Legal Technology Regulation Bill defining permissible AI use, establishing licensing for AI tools, and delineating responsibilities among users, developers, and institutions.
3. Judicial Rules: Courts should adopt protocols on the admissibility and evaluation of AI-generated materials, especially where bias or data integrity is in question.
4. Mandatory Disclosure Requirements: Lawyers should be required to disclose when AI is used in preparing legal documents, particularly in contentious matters like litigation or arbitration.

7.1 Findings and Analysis

This section critically examines the central tension explored in this paper — whether artificial intelligence (AI) in legal practice is a threat or a tool for the Nigerian lawyer. Drawing from the chapters above, it is evident that the answer is not binary. Rather, AI is a dual-edged instrument,

⁵⁴ European Commission, 'Proposal for a Regulation Laying Down Harmonised Rules on Artificial Intelligence (Artificial Intelligence Act)', COM/2021/206 final.

⁵⁵ American Bar Association, 'Formal Opinion 498: Virtual Practice' (2021).

⁵⁶ Solicitors Regulation Authority (UK), 'Technology and Legal Services' Report (2021), [<https://www.sra.org.uk>] accessed 23 July 2025.

whose impact depends largely on how it is regulated, adopted, and integrated into Nigeria's legal landscape.

i. The Threat is real, but not absolute

AI does present legitimate threats to the traditional model of law practice in Nigeria, especially:

- a. Job redundancy for junior lawyers⁵⁷
- b. Over-reliance on machines that lack ethical reasoning⁵⁸
- c. Gaps in liability and accountability
- d. Unchecked expansion of legal advice by non-lawyer AI systems

The concern is heightened by the Nigerian context where:

- i. Digital literacy is uneven across practitioners
- ii. Many firms still operate manually
- iii. Regulatory bodies are yet to publish any AI -specific policies

Yet, these threats are not fatal. Just as email, e-filing, and virtual court hearings once posed disruption, they are now fully integrated into Nigerian legal workflow.

ii. Nigerian Lawyers are already using AI, even if minimally

Through platforms like, LawPavilion, Primsol, and Legalpedia, Nigerian lawyers already rely on AI for case search, citation summaries, and predictive analytics⁵⁹. While these tools are not as advanced as Western platforms like Lex Machina or ROSS Intelligence, they represent early adoption and openness to innovation.

Surveys conducted by the Nigerian Bar Association Section on Business Law (NBA-SBL) in 2023 found that over 40% of commercial law firms in Lagos use some form of AI-enabled legal research tool.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Remus D and Levy F, 'Can Robots Be Lawyers?' (2016) 30 *Georgetown J. Legal Ethics* 501.

⁵⁸ Casey A and Niblett A, 'The Death of Rules and Standards' (2020) 92 *NYU L. Rev.* 1.

⁵⁹ LawPavilion, AI in Nigerian Legal Research Tools (2024) [<https://lawpavilion.com>] accessed on the 15th of July, 2025.

⁶⁰ NBA-SBL, Technology and Legal Services Surveys (2023).

iii. Tool vs. Threat: It Depends on the Lens

- From a regulatory perspective, AI is a threat unless proper frameworks are in place.
- From an economic perspective, it is a tool for growth, reducing cost and improving service delivery.
- From an ethical lens, it poses serious dilemmas if transparency and accountability are not prioritised.
- From the client's lens, AI is welcomed as it enables speed, affordability, and simplified legal language.⁶¹

iv. Opportunities for Collaboration, Not Elimination

AI is unlikely to replace lawyers entirely. What it will replace is:

- a. Lawyers who fail to adapt and upskill
- b. Manual tasks that do not require judgment or persuasion

The future belongs to “augmented lawyers” who combine human empathy with AI-driven efficiency.⁶² As one scholar rightly said:

“The lawyer who uses AI will replace the lawyer who does not.”⁶³

v. Missed Opportunity or Transformational Shift?

If Nigeria fails to create an enabling environment, we risk:

- a. Becoming a dumping grounds for foreign legal technology.
- b. Widening the justice gap between urban and rural communities
- c. Creating an elitist AI-powered legal class

But if embraced responsibly, AI could:

- i. Modernize the judiciary
- ii. Digitize legal education
- iii. Improve the quality and affordability of justice delivery

⁶¹ DoNotPay, The World's First Robot Lawyer [<https://donotpay.com>] 24 July 2025.

⁶² Susskind R, Tomorrow's Lawyers: An Introduction to Your Future (Oxford University Press 2017).

⁶³ Ibid

8.1 Summary

The global rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI) is redefining legal practice, prompting a critical evaluation of its implications particularly in Nigeria. This article explores whether AI should be seen as a threat to the legal profession or a tool for the modern lawyer. Through a comparative, socio-legal analysis, it argues that AI, though disruptive, offers transformative potential that can be harnessed responsibly to enhance legal service delivery, improve access to justice, and increase the efficiency of the Nigerian legal system. At the core, the article examines the concept, nature, and types of Artificial Intelligence, distinguishing between narrow AI (which handles specific tasks like legal research or document review) and general AI (which mimics broader human reasoning). It also introduces important subsets such as machine learning, natural language processing (NLP), and expert systems technologies that already influence legal operations in other jurisdictions.

In reviewing the development and uses of AI in legal practice, the article highlights how AI-powered tools are now embedded in global legal workflows. Applications range from AI-driven legal research platforms like LexisNexis and ROSS Intelligence, to contract review tools such as Kira Systems and Luminance, and even predictive analytics software capable of forecasting litigation outcomes. These tools reduce time, cost, and error, while augmenting lawyers' capacity to deliver smarter, data-driven legal services.

A major portion of the paper investigates the global integration of AI in legal systems, with special focus on eight jurisdictions: the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, China, Singapore, South Africa, India, and the European Union. The U.S., for example, is leading in legal tech innovation, with firms adopting AI for e-discovery and case analytics. The UK emphasizes ethical AI use, with regulatory guidance from bodies like the Law Society. Canada's courts and law firms are using AI for access to justice and legal prediction, while China's "smart courts" showcase an ambitious, AI-driven justice system that raises concerns about transparency and fairness. Singapore demonstrates how strategic innovation, through regulatory sandboxes and structured legal tech adoption, can modernize judicial processes. South Africa and India, although in early stages, show promise through academic involvement and emerging legal tech applications.

When examining AI adoption in Nigeria, the article finds that despite the rising global tide, Nigeria is still lagging. Key challenges include lack of digitized legal infrastructure, low awareness, and minimal regulatory guidance. However, AI has started gaining attention among Nigerian law firms and academic institutions. Tools for legal research and client management are beginning to appear, though widespread adoption remains slow.

Crucially, the article presents a socio-legal analysis of AI's impact. It evaluates AI's advantages efficiency, accuracy, cost-effectiveness, and enhanced legal access against potential threats, such as job displacement, ethical ambiguity, algorithmic bias, and erosion of human judgment in justice delivery. It argues that the real danger lies not in AI itself, but in its unregulated or careless use.

AI must serve as a complement not a replacement for human reasoning, professional discretion, and the empathetic dimensions of legal service.

The article further discusses the legal and regulatory implications, noting that Nigeria lacks specific laws on AI. Current laws like the Nigerian Data Protection Act and the Cybercrimes Act 2015 may touch on peripheral aspects but are not robust enough to govern AI's role in law. The article advocates for the urgent development of a national AI framework, ethical guidelines for AI use in legal practice, and clear accountability standards to govern machine-assisted decision-making. Also central to the discourse is the question of whether Nigerian lawyers are prepared for the AI era. The article contends that legal education must be reformed to include digital literacy, legal informatics, and technology law. Continuous professional development (CPD) programmes should equip lawyers with the necessary skills to work alongside AI. Collaboration between the Nigerian Bar Association, law faculties, and tech developers is critical to close the skill gap.

Ultimately, the article concludes that AI is more of a tool than a threat, provided that Nigeria takes proactive steps. These include:

- a. Developing a national AI and legal tech policy.
- b. Reforming legal education and training.
- c. Strengthening the ethical framework guiding AI's use.
- d. Creating a multidisciplinary ecosystem for legal tech innovation.

Through these measures, AI can transform the legal profession into a more accessible, accountable, and technologically adaptive system, fit for the demands of the 21st century.

8.2 Recommendations

The future of artificial intelligence (AI) in Nigerian legal practice hinges not just on technology, but on the preparedness of the legal system. Based on the analysis thus far, AI should be seen as a complementary tool, not a replacement, for lawyers. However, without adequate policies and training, it can easily become a threat. Below are specific, actionable recommendations for various stakeholders:

A. Nigerian Bar Association (NBA)

- i. Publish AI Practice Guidelines: The NBA should develop ethical and procedural guidelines for AI use in legal practice, akin to the ABA's Formal Opinion 498⁶⁴. These

⁶⁴ American Bar Association, 'Formal Opinion 498: Virtual Practice' (2021).

guidelines should address issues such as the duty of competence, transparency with clients, and liability for AI-assisted advice.

- ii. Incorporate Legal Tech in Continuing Legal Education (CLE): Mandatory CLE courses should be expanded to include digital literacy, AI awareness, and legal innovation.

B. Legal Education Institutions

- i. Update Law Curricula: Law faculties and the Nigerian Law School should revise their curricula to include modules on legal technology, artificial intelligence, data privacy, and emerging law-tech interfaces⁶⁵.
- ii. Collaborate with LegalTech Hubs: Institutions should partner with platforms such as Innovation Law Club Africa, Legal Hackers Lagos, and TechHer NG to provide practical exposure to AI tools⁶⁶.

C. The Judiciary

- i. Establish Judicial Technology Task Forces: Courts should form committees to assess AI's relevance in judicial work, including smart case assignment, judgment drafting assistance, and case delay analysis.
- ii. Adopt Intelligent Court Management Systems: AI can support e-filing, docket management, and intelligent scheduling to reduce case backlogs, especially in high-volume states.

D. National Assembly and Legal Regulators

- i. Enact a Legal Technology Regulation Act: The Act should define legal AI services, assign liability, and set licensing and compliance standards for legaltech products in Nigeria.
- ii. Establish a LegalTech Oversight Commission: A national commission, perhaps under the Ministry of Justice or NITDA, should regulate, monitor, and accredit AI tools in the legal industry.⁶⁷

E. LegalTech Developers

- i. Prioritise Nigerian Context and Languages: Developers must train their models on Nigerian case law, statutes, and practices, and create multilingual bots that understand Pidgin English and indigenous languages.

⁶⁵ Chukwuemeka J, 'Technology and the Future of the Nigerian Judiciary' (2022) *Journal of Law, Policy & Technology* 9(1) 34–49.

⁶⁶ Innovation Law Club Africa, 'LegalTech Training Series' (2023) <https://innovationlawclubafrica.com>

⁶⁷ National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA), 'National AI Policy Draft' (2023).

- ii. Ensure Algorithm Transparency: Legal AI tools must be explainable, auditable, and free from bias especially when used in sensitive fields like criminal law or labour disputes.

F. Digital Infrastructure

- i. Government and judiciary should invest in broadband and courtroom digitization.

G. Public Awareness

- i. Promote legal technology literacy among citizens to bridge access to justice.

H. Capacity Building

- i. CPD programmes on AI use should be made compulsory for practising lawyers.

8.3 Conclusion

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is not merely a futuristic concept, it is already reshaping legal systems across the world. As demonstrated throughout this paper, AI carries both promise and peril for the Nigerian legal profession. On one hand, it threatens to disrupt conventional legal roles, challenge established ethics, and expose gaps in regulatory oversight. On the other hand, if responsibly integrated, it can revolutionise legal service delivery, enhance judicial efficiency, and democratise access to justice. The key insight emerging from this analysis is that AI is a tool, not a replacement. The Nigerian lawyer of the future will not be defined solely by knowledge of statutes and case law, but also by their ability to collaborate with machines, leverage data, and deliver more accurate and efficient services to clients. This calls for retooling the legal curriculum, upskilling practitioners, and creating enforceable ethical standards.

Nigeria cannot afford to remain passive. The rapid global developments in legal technology demand that local actors, from the Bar and the Bench to lawmakers and developers, act decisively. The future Nigerian lawyer must embrace technology, not resist it. This paper has demonstrated that AI, if approached with vision, regulation, and ethical responsibility, is not a threat but a transformational tool. The call is for Nigerian legal stakeholders to rise to the challenge and not be left behind in the unfolding digital legal revolution. The future belongs not to those who resist innovation, but to those who master it wisely and use it ethically.