

## REGULATORY AND ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN NIGERIAN LEGAL PRACTICE

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### ABSTRACT

This study examined the intersection of artificial intelligence and legal practice in Nigeria, assessing both the opportunities and challenges presented by AI integration within a framework traditionally reliant on conventional legal tools and governed by existing statutes and rules of court. Adopting a doctrinal methodology, the research revealed that while artificial intelligence offered substantial benefits to Nigerian legal practice including enhanced efficiency in legal research, improved accuracy in document review, and reduced costs, the absence of a comprehensive legal framework specifically regulating AI constituted a critical impediment to its optimal and responsible utilisation. The study contributed to legal scholarship by evaluating the adequacy of existing Nigerian legal instruments, including the Evidence Act, the Nigeria Data Protection Act, and the Rules of Professional Conduct, in addressing AI-specific challenges and identifying gaps requiring legislative attention. Based on these findings, the research recommended that the National Assembly enact specific legislation regulating AI in Nigeria, establishing standards for algorithmic transparency, liability frameworks for AI-generated harm, and oversight mechanisms, with particular provisions addressing AI use in legal practice including standards for AI-generated evidence and requirements for algorithmic accountability in legal decision-making.

**Keywords:** Regulatory, Ethical Implication, Artificial Intelligence, Legal Practice.

## Introduction

The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into legal practice represents one of the most transformative developments in the legal profession's history, fundamentally altering how legal services are delivered, researched, and adjudicated. In Nigeria, this transformation is increasingly evident as AI-powered tools become more prevalent in legal research, document drafting, contract analysis, and predictive analytics<sup>1</sup>. The Nigerian legal profession stands at a critical crossroads, where the imperative to embrace technological innovation must be carefully balanced against the enduring values of justice, ethics, and professional responsibility.<sup>2</sup>

Legal practice refers to the professional work performed by lawyers, including providing legal advice, representing clients in court, drafting legal documents, negotiating settlements, and other activities related to the application of law. In Nigeria, only licensed attorneys or qualified legal professionals<sup>3</sup>, depending on jurisdiction) can engage in legal practice<sup>4</sup>. Unauthorized practice of law by non-lawyers is prohibited and can lead to penalties.<sup>5</sup> Lawyers must adhere to ethical rules such as confidentiality, conflict of interest rules.

The traditional legal practice placed reliance on the use of legal tools in solving legal matter. These tools rangers from legal books, journals Law dictionaries and periodicals. These materials were traditionally used to ease legal practice.<sup>6</sup> Legal practice has evolved over time and with the emergence of artificial intelligence (AI), legal practice experienced another dimensional system of practice.

One unique feature of legal practice is that there are laws and rules of courts governing the legal practice.<sup>7</sup> These laws and rules of the court spelt out the procedure for doing am act in a particular manner. The laws are the wheel upon which legal practice rested from the very beginning of every legal issue that stumbled the court in Nigeria.

The world has imagined changes through artificial intelligence, which has added to the development of economic, political and even cultural development. The use of artificial intelligence in all field including legal arena help in sharpening and reduces the stress of work. The coming of Artificial intelligence (AI) is commendable however, there are challenges associated with the new technology. The Artificial intelligence has grown beyond speculation but its lack legal backing. The absent of specific legal framework to regulate the use of artificial intelligence, a situation that create legal issue on the use of the AI.

Globally, AI has demonstrated remarkable potential to enhance efficiency, accuracy, and access to justice. Legal professionals can now accomplish in minutes what once required hours of manual research, while automated systems facilitate faster document review and more

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<sup>1</sup> E. C. Earnest and G. U. Awoke and L.O. Emeka and O. B. Chidiebere, *The Role of artificial Intelligence in Nigerian Legal Research: Prospects and Challenges* (Vol. 2, Alex Ekwueme Federal University Law Journal 2025)

<sup>2</sup> L. Sanusi urges lawyers to embrace AI for legal transformation (The Gurdian July 4<sup>th</sup> 2025).

<sup>3</sup> Rule 1 of the Rules of Professional Conduct defines a "Legal Practitioner" as a person entitled to practice law in Nigeria under the Legal Practitioners Act.

<sup>4</sup> S. 2(1) Legal Practitioners Act (LPA) – Cap. L11, LFN 2004.

<sup>5</sup> S. 24 LPA.

<sup>6</sup> O. Adewoye, *The Legal Profession in Nigeria: A Historical Perspective* (Discusses the evolution of Nigerian legal practice 1998).

<sup>7</sup>A. Babalola, *Contemporary Issues in Nigerian Legal Practice* Covers ethics, technology, and reforms (2020)

sophisticated case analysis<sup>8</sup>. However, these technological advancements are accompanied by profound ethical and regulatory challenges. Concerns regarding algorithmic bias, opacity in decision-making, data privacy, professional liability, and the potential erosion of human judgment have emerged as critical issues demanding scholarly attention.<sup>9</sup> The emergence of AI-generated evidence, including deepfakes, further compounds these challenges by threatening the integrity of judicial proceedings and the very concept of truth in litigation.<sup>10</sup>

Within the Nigerian context, these challenges assume particular significance. The country's legal framework, rooted in statutes such as the Evidence Act, the NITDA Act, and the Nigeria Data Protection Act, was developed in an era preceding contemporary AI technologies and remains ill-equipped to address the complexities introduced by algorithmic systems.<sup>11</sup> Existing regulations lack specific provisions governing AI-driven contracts, liability for AI-generated errors, transparency requirements for automated decision-making, or standards for authenticating AI-generated evidence. Furthermore, the Rules of Professional Conduct for legal practitioners do not currently address the ethical obligations of lawyers who employ AI tools in their practice.<sup>12</sup>

Despite growing recognition of AI's impact on Nigerian legal practice, a significant gap exists in the scholarly literature regarding the comprehensive regulatory and ethical framework needed to govern AI integration within Nigeria's unique legal, institutional, and socio-economic context. While existing research has examined discrete aspects of AI in Nigerian law such as its role in legal research<sup>13</sup>, implications for commercial transactions, impact on civil liberties, and admissibility of AI-generated evidence, these studies remain fragmented and sector-specific.

What is notably absent from the current discourse is a holistic examination that synthesises the regulatory and ethical dimensions across the entire spectrum of legal practice. Existing scholarship has not adequately addressed how Nigeria's existing legal infrastructure can be systematically reformed to accommodate AI technologies while preserving fundamental principles of justice. The question of whether Nigeria should develop *sui generis* AI legislation, adapt existing statutes through amendment, or rely on professional regulatory bodies to establish ethical guidelines remains unresolved.<sup>14</sup>

This research gap is particularly concerning given the rapid pace of AI adoption in Nigerian legal practice and the absence of proactive regulatory measures. As Sanusi II recently cautioned, 'The delusion of digital insulation is dangerous. Our regulatory frameworks must reflect this reality, or we will remain permanent consumers of legal standards we did not design'<sup>15</sup>. Without comprehensive scholarly inquiry that maps the contours of an appropriate

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<sup>8</sup> NBA-AGC 2025 in Enugu: Artificial Intelligence and The Future of Legal Practice Dominates Breakfast Session (August 28<sup>th</sup> 2025).

<sup>9</sup>A. Amuda-Kannike and Florence Nemi-Clover and S. Oguche Artificial Intelligence in Legal Practice: Threat or Tool For The Future Lawyer In Nigeria? (Kwasu Law Journal Vol.4 N. 1 2025).

<sup>10</sup> david chukwuebuka mkpo, is truth and integrity of justice on trial in the age of artificial intelligence (ai)? re-assessing digital evidence in the context of ai-generated evidence such as deepfakes (Vol. 7 No. 1 International Review of Law and Jurisprudence 2025)

<sup>11</sup>E. A. Oyewole and O.A. Moses, Artificial intelligence and civil liberties in Nigeria (Nsukka Journal of Religion and Cultural Studies Vol. 13 No. 3 2025).

<sup>12</sup> David (no 12), 34.

<sup>13</sup> E. C. Earnest and G. U. Awoke and L.O. Emeka and O. B. Chidiebere (NO. 3).

<sup>14</sup> E. A. Oyewole (no. 13) 45.

<sup>15</sup> L. Sanusi urges lawyers to embrace AI for legal transformation (The Gurdian July 4<sup>th</sup> 2025).

regulatory response, Nigerian legal institutions risk either stifling innovation through inadequate guidance or permitting unchecked AI deployment that undermines fundamental rights and professional values.

This study therefore seeks to address this gap by undertaking a systematic examination of the regulatory and ethical implications of AI in Nigerian legal practice, with the objective of developing a coherent framework for governance that balances innovation with the protection of justice, rights, and professional integrity.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into legal practice represents one of the most significant transformations confronting the legal profession globally. In Nigeria, this transformation is increasingly evident as AI-powered tools become more prevalent in legal research, document drafting, contract analysis, and predictive analytics. While these technologies offer substantial benefits in terms of efficiency, cost reduction, and expanded access to justice, they simultaneously introduce profound regulatory and ethical challenges that existing legal frameworks are ill-equipped to address. The Nigerian legal profession thus stands at a critical juncture, where the imperative to embrace technological innovation must be carefully balanced against the enduring values of justice, professional responsibility, and ethical integrity.

The core problem this study addresses is the regulatory and ethical gap in governing the integration of Artificial Intelligence into Nigerian legal practice, arising from the absence of a comprehensive legal framework, the inadequacy of existing professional rules to address AI-specific challenges, and the structural limitations of Nigeria's legal infrastructure to accommodate algorithmic decision-making while preserving fundamental principles of justice and professional accountability.

### **Research Questions**

Flowing from the research problem, this study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What is the current state of AI adoption in Nigerian legal practice, and what regulatory and ethical challenges does this adoption present?
2. What comprehensive regulatory and ethical framework would be appropriate for governing AI integration in Nigerian legal practice, balancing innovation with the protection of justice, rights, and professional integrity?

### **Conceptual Clarification**

#### **Legal practice.**

Legal practice is a term which depicts the conglomerate of legal representation of any kind within the contemplation of law. Legal practice is not limited to courtroom advocacy but also covers advisory and transactional work.<sup>16</sup> To a layman, legal practice is limited to appearing in court to represent a client in court. The law contemplated that legal documentation such as drafting contracts, giving legal advice, handling client funds in trust, and legal opinion. Any activity requiring legal knowledge and skill, even if not strictly litigation is fall within the meaning of legal practice in Nigeria.<sup>17</sup>

Legal practice encompasses all professional work done which only persons called to the Nigerian Bar and holding a valid practicing license can engage in.<sup>18</sup> An unauthorized practice of

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<sup>16</sup> *Okike v. LPDC (2005) 15 NWLR (Pt. 949) 471.*

<sup>17</sup> *Chief Gani Fawehinmi v. Nigerian Bar Association (No. 2) (1989) 2 NWLR (Pt. 105) 558.*

<sup>18</sup> *Okafor v. Nweke (2007) 10 NWLR (Pt. 1043) 521.*

law is a criminal offense, punishable under the Legal Practitioners Act. Legal practice takes various form however, there are some activities that do not amount to legal practice.<sup>19</sup> However, persons can represent themselves in court without being engaging in legal practice.

In the case of *Adejumo v. Governor of Lagos State*<sup>20</sup>, the court held that a litigant has a right to appear *in person*. A person who is not a legal practitioner can represent himself in court *pro se*. Act as a friend or agent in certain minor matters like in a small claims action and can engage in non-legal business consultancy unless it involves legal advice.<sup>21</sup> A non-lawyer cannot represent another person in court only licensed lawyers can.

### Artificial Intelligence

The term is frequently applied to the project of developing systems endowed with the intellectual processes characteristic of humans, such as the ability to reason, discover meaning, generalize, or learn from past experience<sup>22</sup>. Artificial Intelligence is increasingly employed in legal research through its capacity to process vast volumes of legal texts including case law, statutes, and academic commentary to extract pertinent information with a speed and efficiency unattainable by human effort alone. These sophisticated tools can identify latent patterns in judicial decisions, predict potential legal outcomes, and automate the drafting of legal documents. However, the significant advantages of speed and convenience offered by these technologies are counterbalanced by pressing concerns regarding accuracy, algorithmic bias, and professional ethics. These challenges are particularly acute within a legal system such as Nigeria's, where precision is not merely a virtue but a foundational requirement for the administration of justice.<sup>23</sup>

Artificial Intelligence (AI) refers to the simulation of human intelligence in machines that are programmed to think, learn, and perform tasks typically requiring human cognition. AI systems are designed to make decisions based on data and logic. Artificial intelligence AI Improve performance over time using techniques like machine learning (ML) and deep learning (DL) and so on.

Different opinion has been expressed with particular reference to the new artificial intelligence AI by writers and legal commentators. A leading scholar in the field of artificial intelligence is regarded as John McCarthy<sup>24</sup> who Coined the Term 'Artificial Intelligence'. John McCarthy defined Artificial intelligence as 'the science and engineering of making intelligent machines, especially intelligent computer programs.' According to Stuart Russell and Peter Norvig, AI is the study of agents that receive precepts from the environment and perform actions."

They classify AI into four categories namely, thinking humanly, acting humanly, thinking rationally, and acting rationally.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>19</sup> *Adejumo v. Governor of Lagos State* (1972) 3 SC 45.

<sup>20</sup> (1972) 3 SC 45.

<sup>21</sup> *Okafor v. NBA* (2020) LPELR-50246(CA).

<sup>22</sup>A.J. Copeland 'Artificial Intelligence (AI) | Definition, Examples, Types, Applications, Companies, & Facts' (Encyclopedia Britannica 20 July 1998) <<https://www.britannica.com/technology/artificial-intelligence>> accessed 15 February 2026.

<sup>23</sup> E. C. Earnest and G. U. Awoke and L.O. Emeka and O. B. Chidiebere, (no. 3) 211

<sup>24</sup>J. McCarthy, *What is artificial intelligence?* Stanford University. 2007 < <http://www-formal.stanford.edu/jmc/whatisai/>> accessed 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2025.

<sup>25</sup>S. Russell, and p. Norvig, *Artificial intelligence: A modern approach* (4th ed. Pearson 2021)

Artificial intelligence is that activity devoted to making machines intelligent, and intelligence is that quality that enables an entity to function appropriately and with foresight in its environment.<sup>26</sup> It is the recent technology that provides easy information on issue and problems submitted to the AI search engine or tools. The information or solution provided by the AI tools is usually reliable first hand and authentic. The world generally today embraces the use of AI in searching for solution base problem in all ramification.

Although the use of artificial intelligence revolutionized legal practice in terms of quick supply and ease solving of legal issues. It is without challenges in that reliability of artificial intelligence might not be totally accepted due to complexities in solving legal matters. Relying on artificial intelligence in legal practice may not present a proper perception of the legal issue giving the technicalities involve in legal practice. Information received through artificial intelligence should be subjected to rigorous scrutiny to ascertain the correctness side by side with judicial authority and enabling laws in that regards though, the importance of artificial intelligence cannot be over emphasized

### **Methodology**

This study adopts a doctrinal research approach, which constitutes the predominant methodology in legal scholarship. Doctrinal research, also described as library-based or theoretical research, investigates what the law is in particular circumstances through systematic analysis of legal doctrine, its development, and application. The methodology entails examination of statutory provisions and case law through logical reasoning, drawing upon both primary sources including legislation, judicial precedents, and international instruments and secondary sources such as textbooks, peer-reviewed journals, and scholarly commentaries. This approach is particularly appropriate for research that seeks to analyse existing legal frameworks, identify regulatory gaps, and propose doctrinal clarity on emerging legal questions.

### **Artificial Intelligence and Legal Practice in Nigeria**

Artificial Intelligence is fundamentally transforming the legal profession by enhancing efficiency, reducing costs, and improving accuracy across multiple practice areas. AI-powered tools employ natural language processing to analyse legal documents and retrieve relevant case law with unprecedented speed compared to traditional research methods.<sup>27</sup> These technologies assist lawyers in assessing case outcomes by examining historical rulings and judicial tendencies, enabling faster formulation of legal opinions on complex issues.<sup>28</sup> In contract analysis, AI automates the identification of key clauses, risks, and anomalies within seconds, while simultaneously suggesting improvements and flagging inconsistencies in real time.<sup>29</sup> The technology further streamlines merger and acquisition due diligence by rapidly analysing thousands of documents for potential risks and helps practitioners stay abreast of evolving legal frameworks.<sup>30</sup> Beyond sophisticated applications, AI tools provide basic legal advice, draft demand letters, assist with small claims matters, and support case preparation by suggesting

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<sup>26</sup> E. Rich, and K. Knight, *Artificial intelligence* (2nd ed. McGraw-Hill.1991)

<sup>27</sup> Legal researchers relied on printed books and official publications to find Case Law, Statutes and Regulations, Administrative Law. Legal research also rely on secondary sources and since raw legal texts can be complex, lawyers used Legal Encyclopedias, Treatises and Hornbooks and Law Review Articles scholarly analyses in journals like *Harvard Law Review*.

<sup>28</sup> D. Remus, and F. Levy, *Can Robots Be Lawyers? Computers, Lawyers, and the Practice of Law*. (Georgetown Journal of Legal Ethics 2017)

<sup>29</sup> J.O. McGinnis and R.G. Pearce, *The Great Disruption: How Machine Intelligence Will Transform the Role of Lawyers in the Delivery of Legal Services* (82 Fordham Law Review 2014)

relevant precedents.<sup>31</sup> The cumulative effect of these innovations includes increased efficiency through automation of repetitive tasks, reduced billable hours for routine work thereby enhancing affordability, minimisation of human error in document review, accelerated case assessment, and improved access to justice for underserved populations.<sup>32</sup>

### **Benefit of Artificial Intelligence to Legal Practice**

The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into legal practice is one of the most significant developments in the profession's history. While AI offers transformative potential, a critical assessment requires moving beyond promotional rhetoric to examine its practical benefits alongside its inherent limitations, particularly within specific contexts like Nigeria. This section evaluates the purported advantages of AI in law, weighing them against concerns related to algorithmic bias, data quality, and infrastructural challenges.

#### **a. Enhancing Efficiency: A Double-Edged Sword**

The primary appeal of AI in law is its capacity to automate repetitive, time-consuming tasks, thereby enhancing efficiency. AI-powered tools can rapidly conduct document review, contract analysis, and e-discovery, sifting through thousands of documents in minutes a process that would take human lawyers' weeks.<sup>33</sup> For example, AI tools used in foreign jurisdictions, like Kira Systems or Relativity, demonstrate the potential for drastically reducing manual workload. This automation could, in theory, free Nigerian legal practitioners to focus on higher-value activities like legal strategy, negotiation, and client counseling.

However, this efficiency gain is not unconditional. Its applicability in Nigeria is severely hampered by the state of local legal infrastructure. Many Nigerian court records, statutes, and case reports are not fully digitized or exist in inconsistent, non-machine-readable formats. An AI tool trained on clean, structured data from Western jurisdictions will be far less efficient and potentially inaccurate when parsing scanned, poorly formatted, or incomplete Nigerian legal documents. The "efficiency" touted by AI vendors presupposes a level of data hygiene and digitization that is not yet a reality across much of the Nigerian legal system. Furthermore, the risk of automation bias where practitioners over-rely on AI output without sufficient scrutiny is a serious concern. As the original text correctly notes, all AI-generated information must be rigorously verified against primary legal sources before being used in client advice or court submissions.

#### **b. Cost Reduction**

AI's potential to lower the cost of legal services is frequently cited as a major benefit. By automating routine work like due diligence and basic legal research, AI could reduce billable hours and make legal assistance more accessible to small businesses and individuals. Free or low-cost AI-driven tools for tasks like drafting tenancy agreements or filing simple claims could democratize access to justice.

Yet, this promise of affordability comes with a significant caveat: the potential for job displacement. In a labor-rich but resource-constrained environment like Nigeria, where

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<sup>30</sup> Kira Systems. *Machine Learning for Contract Review* (2023) <<https://kirasystems.com>> accessed 6 August 2020.

<sup>31</sup> H. Surden, *Machine Learning and Law* (89 Washington Law Review 2014)

<sup>32</sup> American Bar Association (ABA) *Report on the Future of Legal Services in the United States* (2019)

<sup>33</sup> R. Grossman, and G.V. Cormack, G. V. (2016). *Technology-Assisted Review in E-Discovery Can Be More Effective and Efficient Than Exhaustive Manual Review*. Richmond Journal of Law & Technology ( [PDF 2016](#)).

young lawyers traditionally gain experience through the very routine tasks AI seeks to automate, the widespread adoption of AI poses an existential threat to junior-level employment. The concern is not just about lawyers losing jobs, but about the erosion of the traditional apprenticeship model where foundational legal skills are built through hands-on practice. A balanced approach is crucial. The goal should not be to replace legal practitioners with AI, but to create a synergistic relationship where AI handles rote tasks, allowing lawyers to focus on complex, nuanced work that requires professional judgment. This would ideally lower costs for clients while preserving and evolving the role of the Nigerian lawyer, provided the profession adapts its training and business models accordingly.

**c. Improved Accuracy and Reduced Human Error**

Proponents argue that AI minimizes human error by identifying inconsistencies and flagging risks in contract review and due diligence with superhuman precision. For instance, NLP tools can detect missing clauses or unfavorable terms that a fatigued lawyer might overlook. This capability is undeniably valuable for enhancing the quality of legal work.

However, the assertion of "improved accuracy" is misleading without addressing the issue of algorithmic bias. AI models are trained on existing data, and if that data reflects historical biases, the AI will learn and perpetuate them. In a legal context, this could have devastating consequences. An AI tool used for pretrial risk assessment, if trained on data reflecting biased policing or sentencing patterns, could produce racially or socioeconomically biased recommendations. In Nigeria, where societal biases based on ethnicity, religion, or class can be pronounced, deploying such tools without rigorous, local testing and bias mitigation strategies would be ethically fraught and could compound existing injustices. The "accuracy" of an AI is only as good as the impartiality of its training data, a standard that is rarely met.

**d. Enhanced Legal Research and Predictive Analytics**

AI-powered research tools like Westlaw Edge and CARA A.I. offer the ability to find more relevant case law faster than traditional methods. The promise of predictive analytics, where tools like Lex Machina analyze judicial histories to forecast case outcomes, is also alluring.<sup>34</sup> This could help Nigerian lawyers better assess litigation risks and advise clients on whether to settle or proceed to trial.

However, the applicability of such tools in Nigeria is limited. These platforms are built on extensive, well-structured databases of foreign case law. A comparable Nigerian tool would require a comprehensive, digitized, and consistently updated database of judgments from the Supreme Court, Court of Appeal, and various High Courts a resource that is currently under development but far from complete. Furthermore, the predictive power of AI is often overstated. As the original text wisely notes, every case is ultimately decided on its specific facts and circumstances. AI can provide statistical probabilities, but it cannot account for the nuance of a particular argument, the demeanor of a witness, or the exercise of judicial discretion. In a common law system like Nigeria's, where precedent is binding but distinguishable, a lawyer's ability to craft a unique argument remains paramount, a skill AI cannot replicate.

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<sup>34</sup> N. Aletras and Others (2016). *Predicting Judicial Decisions of the European Court of Human Rights*. (PeerJ Computer Science 2016) <DOI: 10.7717/peerj-cs.93> accessed on 10 July, 2025> accessed 19 Feb. 2026. At about 7:30pm

**e. Data-Driven Decision Making**

The concepts of data-driven decision-making and streamlined contract management face similar infrastructural barriers. The idea that AI can analyze past cases to recommend optimal legal strategies or track judicial tendencies is compelling<sup>35</sup>, but it is entirely dependent on the availability of reliable, digitized data. Without this foundational layer, such analysis is impossible. While a Nigerian law firm could theoretically use AI to manage its own internal database of contracts, flagging renewal dates and ensuring consistency, the broader promise of strategic, data-driven litigation support remains largely aspirational until Nigeria's legal data ecosystem matures.<sup>36</sup>

**f. Streamlined Contract Lifecycle Management and Process Efficiency vs. Professional Judgment**

AI-powered tools are increasingly being deployed to manage contracts throughout their lifecycle from drafting and negotiation to review and compliance monitoring. These systems offer significant process efficiencies. For instance, an AI tool like LawGeex can automate contract review, flagging non-standard clauses, identifying potential risks, and ensuring consistency across a portfolio of agreements far more quickly than a manual review.<sup>37</sup> It can automatically track key clauses, renewal dates, and compliance obligations, reducing the administrative burden on legal teams and minimizing the risk of missed deadlines or overlooked commitments.<sup>38</sup>

Proponents argue that this automation can reduce contract disputes by ensuring greater clarity and consistency in drafting<sup>39</sup>. By helping to identify ambiguous language or missing terms, AI can contribute to more robust agreements. Theoretically, this allows human lawyers to focus on high-stakes negotiation and the strategic elements of a transaction, rather than line-by-line proofreading.

However, this techno-optimistic view requires significant qualification, especially within the Nigerian context. The quality of AI-assisted contract review is entirely dependent on the data it is trained on and the instructions it is given. An AI model trained primarily on standard-form contracts from common law jurisdictions like the UK or US may miss nuances critical in Nigerian contract law, such as specific legislative requirements, local customary law implications, or peculiar drafting conventions. Furthermore, the best clause for a contract is rarely a matter of simple detection; it is a strategic decision based on the client's commercial objectives, risk appetite, and bargaining power. An AI can flag

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<sup>35</sup> J. Casey and A. Niblett, A. (2019). *Self-Driving Laws*. (University of Toronto Law Journal. SSRN 2019)

<sup>36</sup> N. Aletras and Others (2016). *Predicting Judicial Decisions of the European Court of Human Rights*. (PeerJ Computer Science 2016) <DOI: 10.7717/peerj-cs.93> accessed on 10 July, 2025.

<sup>37</sup> LawGeex, *AI vs. Lawyers: Comparing Accuracy & Speed in Contract Review*. ([Report 2018](#))

<sup>38</sup> J. Savelka and K.D. Ashley, *AI in Legal Document Review: An Empirical Study*. Artificial Intelligence and Law. ([Springer 2021](#))

<sup>39</sup>M. Sinkala and Y. Duan, H. Yuan, and D. Shasha ContractNerd: An AL Tool to Find Unenforceable, Ambiguous, and Prejudicial Clauses in Contracts , Center for Data Science, New York University, New York, NY 10003, USA Department of Computer Science, Courant Institute of Mathematical Sciences, New York University, New York, NY 10012, USA  
Author to whom correspondence should be addressed. Electronic 2025, 14 (21), 4212;  
<https://doi.org/10.3390/electronics14214212>

the absence of a force majeure clause, but it cannot advise a client on how forcefully to negotiate its terms in a specific commercial context.

Perhaps most critically, the assertion that AI is smarter than a lawyer is a fundamental misunderstanding of both AI and legal practice. AI excels at processing structured information and identifying patterns at scale. It is not, however, smart or intelligent in the human sense. It possesses no understanding of the underlying law, the client's broader business goals, or the relational dynamics between the parties. It cannot exercise judgment, empathy, or creativity. The value of a lawyer lies not just in their ability to draft a clause, but in their capacity to understand the client's world, anticipate future disputes a human might cause, and craft a solution that is not only legally sound but also commercially and practically wise. AI is a powerful tool that can augment a lawyer's capabilities, but it remains a tool, not a replacement for the professional judgment that lies at the heart of legal practice.

Therefore, AI holds undeniable benefits for legal practice, including enhanced efficiency, potential cost reduction, and support for more rigorous analysis<sup>40</sup>. However, a responsible path forward requires a critical perspective that acknowledges its limitations. For Nigeria, the primary challenge is not simply acquiring AI tools, but building the digital infrastructure data standardization, digitization of records, and investment in local technological expertise necessary for them to function effectively and equitably. Moreover, the profession must proactively engage with the ethical implications of algorithmic bias and workforce displacement to ensure that AI serves as a tool for justice and progress, rather than a source of new forms of inequality and error.

### **Challenges of Artificial Intelligence to Legal Practice**

The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into Nigeria's legal sector presents significant opportunities but also faces several challenges. Some of the challenges are self-inflicting whereas other lack of regulatory framework on the use of information generated from artificial intelligence in Nigeria. This article will examine some of the challenges in details.

#### **i. Lack of a Coherent and Adequate Legal Framework**

The foundational challenge to AI adoption in Nigeria is the absence of a specific and comprehensive legal framework. Unlike pioneering jurisdictions that have enacted AI-specific legislation, Nigeria operates in a regulatory vacuum. This lacuna creates profound ambiguities regarding the status of AI-generated legal advice, the allocation of liability for AI-driven errors, and the applicability of extant laws<sup>41</sup>.

The issue is not merely the absence of law, but the inadequacy of existing ones to govern this novel technology. For instance, while the Nigerian Data Protection Regulation (NDPR) 2019 provides a baseline for data privacy, it was not designed with the unique complexities of AI systems such as algorithmic transparency, automated decision-making, and cross-border data flows in mind. This legal uncertainty stifles investment and innovation, as law firms and tech developers cannot accurately assess their compliance risks. Furthermore, the ethical guidelines of the legal profession, primarily the Rules of Professional Conduct for Legal Practitioners, are silent on an attorney's

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<sup>40</sup> D.M. Katz and M.J. Bommarito and J. Blackman, *A general approach for predicting the behavior of the Supreme Court of the United States*. (PLOS ONE. 2017) < DOI: [10.1371/journal.pone.0174698](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0174698)> accessed on 10 July, 2025.

<sup>41</sup> E.O. Oke, Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Legal Practice in Nigeria: Challenges and Prospects (*NIALS Journal of Law and Public Policy*, 5(1), 45-62 2021)

ethical obligations when using AI, leaving practitioners in a precarious position regarding competence and supervision of non-human tools.

**ii. Deficits in Critical Technological Infrastructure**

The efficacy of AI is entirely dependent on robust technological infrastructure. In Nigeria, this foundation is critically weak. Persistent issues with unstable power supply and high costs of reliable internet connectivity create an environment hostile to the consistent operation of AI tools. This challenge underscores a fundamental socio-economic barrier. AI is a sophisticated tool that cannot function in a pre-industrial environment. The infrastructural deficit effectively excludes a vast majority of legal practitioners and firms, particularly those outside major commercial hubs, from any potential benefits of legal technology. Furthermore, the problem extends beyond national infrastructure to the firm level. Many Nigerian law firms lack the requisite modern hardware (servers, high-performance computers) and updated software ecosystems. The assertion that many firms are "below standard" is a harsh but accurate reflection of a profession where capital investment in technology has historically been low, creating a vicious cycle of underdevelopment and resistance to tech-driven efficiency.

**iii. The Prohibitive Cost of AI Solutions**

The financial barrier to entry for AI-powered legal tools is exceptionally high. Leading platforms like LexisNexis, Westlaw, or specialized AI research tools operate on subscription models priced for Western markets, making them prohibitively expensive for the majority of Nigerian law firms.<sup>42</sup>

This economic reality threatens to exacerbate inequality within the legal profession. It creates a two-tiered system where well-resourced, large commercial law firms can afford AI tools to enhance efficiency and profitability, while small and medium-sized practices are left to rely on slower, traditional methods. This competitive disadvantage could drive smaller firms out of the market or relegate them to less lucrative legal work. The argument that AI is a "revolution" is therefore only half the story; without accessible pricing models or local, more affordable alternatives, it becomes an instrument of consolidation and exclusion rather than widespread progress.<sup>43</sup>

**iv. A Widening Skills Gap and Limited Awareness**

The successful deployment of AI in law requires a workforce that is not only aware of the technology's potential but also possesses the technical literacy to use it effectively. The Nigerian legal sector currently exhibits a significant deficit in both areas. Many practitioners, particularly those from an older generation, remain reliant on traditional research methods and may lack basic digital skills. The problem is twofold: a lack of basic digital literacy and a lack of specialized expertise. It is insufficient for a lawyer to simply "have access" to the internet; they must be able to formulate precise prompts, critically evaluate AI-generated outputs for jurisdictional accuracy and bias, and ethically integrate these findings into their legal work. The absence of "AI-skilled legal professionals" or legal technologists within Nigerian firms means that even when AI tools are available, they are often underutilized or misapplied. Furthermore, the skepticism surrounding the "correctness and credibility" of AI-generated information is

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<sup>42</sup> K. Adebayo, *The Digital Divide in Nigeria's Legal Sector: Can AI Bridge the Gap?* (*Journal of Law and Technology*, 8(2) 2022) 112-130.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

valid and highlights the need for a new form of professional competence—the ability to act as a critical supervisor of AI, rather than a passive recipient of its output.

**v. Acute Data Privacy and Security Vulnerabilities**

The legal profession is built on a bedrock of client confidentiality. AI systems, which learn and function by processing vast datasets, pose an inherent risk to this principle. This risk is magnified in Nigeria by the country's generally weak cybersecurity infrastructure. The potential for data breaches is not merely a technical concern but a profound ethical and professional liability<sup>44</sup>. Feeding sensitive client information into a cloud-based AI platform could inadvertently expose it to third parties, violate attorney-client privilege, and breach the NDPR. The lack of clear data sovereignty regulations rules that determine where client data is stored and processed compounds this risk. Many AI tools are hosted on servers outside Nigeria, potentially subjecting sensitive legal information to foreign jurisdictions. Until robust, locally verifiable data security protocols and clear ethical guidelines on client-data handling in AI applications are established, the fear of exposing client identity and information will remain a powerful deterrent to adoption.

**vi. Professional Inertia and Contextual Incompatibility**

Resistance to change is a hallmark of any conservative profession, and the Nigerian Bar is no exception. This resistance is fueled by two primary fears: the fear of job displacement and the fear that AI tools, trained on foreign law, are irrelevant to the Nigerian legal context.<sup>45</sup>

The fear of job displacement, while understandable, often stems from a misconception of AI as a replacement rather than an augmentation tool. AI automates tasks, not jobs. The more potent challenge is the issue of contextual incompatibility. AI legal tools are predominantly trained on vast databases of American or British case law, statutes, and legal conventions<sup>46</sup>. The Nigerian legal system, while rooted in the common law tradition, has its own unique statutes, a growing body of local case law, and customary laws that are not digitized or represented in these datasets. Consequently, an AI tool might provide a technically correct answer under California law, which could be misleading or entirely wrong in a Nigerian court<sup>47</sup>. This lack of local relevance is a critical failure point, and it will persist until there is a concerted effort to digitize Nigeria's legal corpus and develop AI models trained on it.

**vii. Unresolved Ethical and Accountability Dilemmas**

Finally, the advent of AI introduces a fundamental accountability gap. In the traditional model, a lawyer is unequivocally liable for negligence in representing a client. When an AI tool provides flawed legal research or generates an erroneous document, the lines of responsibility become blurred. The central question is the lawyer or the software developer liable? remains unanswered by both the judiciary and the Nigerian Bar

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<sup>44</sup> Nigerian Bar Association (NBA), *Cybersecurity and Data Protection Guidelines for Lawyers* (Highlights risks associated with AI-driven legal tech and client confidentiality 2020).

<sup>45</sup> D. Oluwu, *AI and the Nigerian Lawyer: Attitudes Towards Legal Tech Adoption*. (*African Journal of Comparative Law*, 12(3), 2023) 78-95.

<sup>46</sup> Legal Defence and Assistance Project (LEDAP). (2022). *Digitization of Nigerian Case Laws: Challenges and Opportunities*.

<sup>47</sup> Oluwu (n 33).

Association (NBA).<sup>48</sup> Holding the lawyer strictly liable for all AI-generated output imposes a duty of near-impossible supervision, requiring them to verify every piece of information produced by a "black box" algorithm. Conversely, placing liability on the developer creates a complex product liability framework for professional services. The NBA's silence on this issue is no longer tenable.<sup>49</sup> Without clear ethical guidelines that define the standard of care for lawyers using AI and establish a framework for accountability, the adoption of this technology will be fraught with professional risk, potentially exposing both lawyers and their clients to unforeseen harms.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Artificial intelligence possesses the potential to revolutionise legal practice in Nigeria by improving efficiency, reducing costs, and enhancing legal research capabilities. However, realising this potential requires deliberate and coordinated action to address the regulatory, ethical, and infrastructural challenges identified in this study. Stakeholders including the government, the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA), legal technology innovators, and academic institutions must collaborate to create enabling policies, improve technological infrastructure, and promote AI literacy among legal practitioners. AI is not intended to replace lawyers but to empower them to work smarter, enabling greater focus on complex legal reasoning and client engagement. Law firms that embrace AI strategically will gain a competitive edge, while those that resist may find themselves unable to meet evolving client expectations. However, technological adoption must be accompanied by corresponding evolution in ethical and regulatory frameworks to ensure fairness, accountability, and the continued integrity of legal practice. It is therefore recommended that a proper regulatory framework should be established to govern the deployment and use of artificial intelligence in Nigerian legal practice. Such a framework should provide clear standards for AI-generated information, establish liability mechanisms for algorithmic errors, and create synergy between artificial intelligence and legal practitioners. This synergy will enhance the capacity of the legal profession to deliver quick and accurate responses to legal matters while ensuring that all AI-assisted work remains within the bounds of established legal principles and professional ethics.

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<sup>48</sup> International Bar Association (IBA). *Artificial Intelligence and Robotics in Legal Services* (Addresses global ethical concerns, including liability for AI errors in legal practice 2021).

<sup>49</sup> P. Eze, *Regulating AI in Nigeria: The Need for a Legal Framework*. *Nigerian (Journal of Technology Law & Policy*, 7(1), 2022) 33-50

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