

THE ROLE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN LEGAL PRACTICE: OPPORTUNITIES AND RISKS FOR THE NIGERIAN LEGAL SYSTEM



By Record Of Law / November 17, 2025

Authored By: Ayoaloko Unlimited God Eniola
Leadcity University Ibadan

ABSTRACT

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is rapidly transforming legal practice around the world, and Nigeria is no exception. This paper explores how AI can revolutionize the Nigerian legal system by speeding up case research, reducing costs, and improving access to justice for ordinary citizens. It also examines the risks and challenges associated with AI, including algorithmic bias, threats to client confidentiality, job displacement for young lawyers, and the absence of clear legal and ethical guidelines. By analyzing both local and international experiences, the article argues that Nigeria must adopt robust regulatory frameworks, strengthen digital infrastructure, and equip legal practitioners with the necessary skills to use AI responsibly. Ultimately, the paper emphasizes that AI should serve as a tool to complement human judgment rather than replace it, ensuring that technological innovation enhances fairness, transparency, and professionalism in legal practice. Thoughtful adoption today can shape a more efficient, equitable, and accessible justice system for the future.

INTRODUCTION

Imagine walking into a courtroom where the judge uses a digital assistant that instantly retrieves every relevant case in Nigerian legal history before delivering judgment. Or picture a young lawyer completing a 10-hour legal research task in just 10 minutes all thanks to Artificial Intelligence.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) refers to computer systems designed to perform tasks that normally require human intelligence, such as reasoning, problem-solving, and decision-making. Put simply, AI is about teaching machines to “think” and act like humans.

AI is quietly rewriting the rules of legal practice worldwide from drafting contracts in seconds to predicting the outcomes of lawsuits. For Nigeria, where the legal system is plagued by court delays, case backlogs, and high litigation costs, AI offers a rare opportunity to transform access to justice.

However, this significant power also brings with it a need for considerable accountability. If left unregulated, AI could introduce bias into judicial decisions, compromise client confidentiality, and even threaten the jobs of thousands of young lawyers. This paper (article) explores how AI can be both a powerful tool and a potential threat to Nigeria’s legal system and why now is the right moment to develop clear, enforceable rules for its responsible use.

OVERVIEW OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN LAW

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is no longer a futuristic idea; it is now shaping how many professions, including law, operate on a daily basis. Put simply, AI refers to computer systems or programs that are able to perform tasks which normally require human reasoning, learning, and decision making

In legal practice, AI is being used to make work faster, more accurate, and more efficient. For instance, in jurisdictions like the United States, AI-powered tools such as **ROSS Intelligence** and **Case text** allow lawyers to search through thousands of case reports within seconds and receive precise, context specific answers to legal questions. These systems can also review lengthy contracts, point out inconsistencies or missing clauses, and even predict the likely outcome of a dispute by analyzing trends in past judgements.

Although Nigeria has not fully embraced AI in its legal system, there are encouraging signs of programs. Many forward-thinking law firms are already using local legal

research platforms like **LawPavilion** and **Primsol** both of which have started integrating AI-driven search features to make case law retrieval faster. The Nigerian judiciary is also experimenting with virtual hearings and electronic filing of court documents reforms that could pave the way for AI-assisted case management and a more efficient justice system.

This shows why AI is increasingly described as a “game-changer” for the legal profession. Understanding its potential is key to appreciating how it could reshape Nigeria’s legal landscape in the coming years.

OPPORTUNITIES OF AI IN THE NIGERIAN LEGAL SYSTEM

Artificial Intelligence could become one of the most transformative tools for Nigeria’s legal system if we learn to use it wisely.

One of its biggest promises is **speed**. Tasks that used to take junior lawyers several days, like case research or reviewing precedents, can now be done in minutes using AI tools. This means lawyers will be able to prepare their cases faster, answer client questions more quickly, and generally work with much greater efficiency.

AI also offers a real chance at **cutting legal costs**. In Nigeria, the high price of legal services often discourages ordinary citizens from going to court. If AI can reduce the number of hours lawyers spend drafting documents or combing through contracts, legal fees could drop making justice more affordable and accessible, especially for those from low-income backgrounds.

Another key area is **reducing courtroom delays**. Everyone knows how clogged Nigerian courts can be. With AI helping with scheduling, filing, and case tracking, cases could move through the system faster, reducing the frustrating backlog that keeps people waiting years for justice.

Lastly, AI could spark **innovation in legal training and practice**. For law students and young lawyers, AI tools can be a powerful learning partner helping

them analyze judgments, practice arguments, and develop sharper legal reasoning. This could ultimately raise the standard of legal practice across the country.

RISKS AND CHALLENGES OF AI IN THE NIGERIAN LEGAL SYSTEM

Although Artificial Intelligence offers exciting possibilities, it also presents serious risks that must be addressed if it is to be safely adopted within Nigeria's legal sector.

One of the most pressing concerns is **algorithmic bias**. Since AI systems are trained on existing data, any bias contained in past judgments or legal records can be replicated and even amplified by the technology. These could result in unfair outcomes, especially for vulnerable groups, and gradually erode public trust in the courts.

Another major challenge is **data privacy and client confidentiality**. Legal practice deals with sensitive information, from corporate secrets to personal data of litigants. If AI systems are poorly secured, there is a risk of hacking, data leaks, or unlawful surveillance. While, the Nigeria Data Protection Act 2023 provides a legal framework for protecting personal information, enforcement remains relatively weak, and many legal practitioners are not yet fully compliant.

There is also the issue of **job displacement**. AI is capable of automating routine tasks such as document review, legal research, and even first drafts of contracts. If this transition is not properly managed, it could significantly reduce opportunities for entry-level lawyers, which are crucial for gaining experience and building competence in the profession.

Finally, the **absence of clear regulation** poses a serious risk. Nigeria currently lacks any specific legislation governing the use of AI in legal practice. Without proper oversight, untested or unreliable AI tools could be deployed in areas like criminal justice, leading to wrongful convictions or other miscarriages of justice.

For these reasons, it is essential to create a robust regulatory framework, build capacity among legal professionals, and ensure that AI systems used in Nigeria are transparent, fair, and accountable.

LEGAL AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

For Artificial Intelligence to be successfully integrated into Nigeria's legal system, its deployment must be guided by a clear legal framework and strong ethical principles.

From a **legal standpoint**, one of the most important instruments is the **Nigeria Data Protection Act 2023 (NDPA)**, which sets out rules for the collection, processing, and protection of personal data. This is critical where AI tools handle sensitive case files or client information. Law firms and courts using AI are legally required to ensure that data is processed fairly, securely, and for legitimate purposes. Unfortunately, compliance with the NDPA is still inconsistent, as many legal practitioners remain unaware of their responsibilities under the Act.

From an **ethical perspective**, lawyers are still bound by the **Rules of Professional Conduct for Legal Practitioners 2007**, which emphasize duties such as confidentiality, diligence, and professional competence. The use of AI must support, not undermine, these duties. For example, when a lawyer relies on an AI-generated opinion or draft, they remain professionally obligated to review, verify, and take responsibility for its accuracy. Failure to do so could amount to professional negligence.

Nigeria can also **draw lessons from international best practices**.

The **European Union's Artificial Intelligence Act (2024)** provides a useful template, classifying AI systems by risk level and placing stricter requirements on high-risk applications, including those in law enforcement and justice. Likewise, the **OECD Principles on AI** promote transparency, accountability, and respect for human rights in the use of AI technologies. Adapting these frameworks could help Nigeria develop its own AI policy that balances innovation with the protection of citizens' rights.

Ultimately, without strong legal and ethical guardrails, AI could be misused leading to biased outcomes or breaches of privacy. This makes it essential for policymakers, the Nigerian Bar Association, and other stakeholders to collaborate in creating clear regulations that ensure AI strengthens, rather than weakens, the integrity of Nigeria's legal system.

PRACTICAL CHALLENGES OF ADOPTING AI IN the LEGAL SECTOR

While the potential of AI in law is enormous, its practical implementation faces several roadblocks that cannot be ignored.

1. High Cost of Implementation

The first and perhaps most significant challenge is cost. Advanced AI systems such as those used for predictive analytics, contract review, or legal research are expensive to purchase, implement, and maintain. Many small and mid-sized law firms in Nigeria may find it difficult to justify such investments, especially when they are still struggling with basic infrastructure such as stable electricity, internet connectivity, and secure servers. This financial barrier risks deepening the digital divide between large commercial firms that can afford AI and smaller firms that cannot.

2. Lack of Technical Expertise and Skills Gap

Lawyers are traditionally trained in advocacy, legal drafting, and statutory interpretation not data science or coding. This skills gap means firms must either hire external technical experts or invest heavily in training programmes to enable staff to use AI tools effectively. Unfortunately, most Nigerian law schools have yet to integrate legal technology and AI into their curriculum, leaving graduates underprepared for technology-driven practice.

3. Resistance to Change and Cultural Barriers

The legal profession is inherently conservative and slow to adopt disruptive innovations. Many practitioners fear that AI could replace junior lawyers, interns, or paralegals, leading to job losses. This fear sometimes breeds resistance, even when AI could make legal practice more efficient. Overcoming this mindset requires sensitization and continuing professional

development programmes to demonstrate that AI should complement not replace human judgment.

4. Data Quality and Case Digitization

AI thrives on large, accurate, and structured datasets. However, Nigeria's legal records are far from fully digitized, and many court archives remain paper-based. Inconsistent record-keeping, missing case files, and slow adoption of e-filing systems hinder the effectiveness of AI tools in tasks such as case outcome prediction or analytics. Until case law databases become more comprehensive and accessible, AI outputs will remain limited.

5. Cybersecurity and Data Protection Risks

AI systems process sensitive legal information, including client data, confidential evidence, and privileged communication. This creates a serious risk of hacking, data breaches, or misuse of information if adequate cybersecurity measures are not in place. Firms must therefore invest not only in AI tools but also in robust data protection protocols to comply with the Nigeria Data Protection Act 2023 and safeguard client trust.

6. Regulatory and Ethical Uncertainty

Nigeria currently lacks a comprehensive legal framework governing the use of AI in law. This creates uncertainty about liability when AI makes an error for instance, if an AI tool provides incorrect legal research that leads to a malpractice suit. Without clear policies from regulators like the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA) or the National Assembly, firms risk legal exposure and ethical breaches when deploying AI.

7. Limited Local AI Development

Most AI legal tools used today are developed abroad and trained on foreign case law, making them less suited for Nigeria's unique legal landscape. This reliance on imported technology not only raises questions of cost and accessibility but also of data sovereignty who controls Nigerian legal data and how it is used.

CONCLUSION AND WAY FORWARD

Artificial Intelligence is no longer a futuristic concept it is already reshaping the practice of law around the world. For Nigeria and other developing countries, the question is no longer whether to adopt AI but **how** to do so in a way that is fair,

inclusive, and sustainable. The opportunities are vast: faster case research, cheaper legal services, reduction of case backlogs, and improved access to justice for the average citizen.

Recent reports, such as the International Bar Association and CAIDP's *The Future is Now*, highlight how law firms globally are embedding AI tools into their workflows, suggesting that Nigeria will need robust policies to keep pace with global standards. In Africa, Lawyers Hub notes that several countries including Kenya and Rwanda are already experimenting with AI in judicial systems, for instance, using AI for court transcription, e-filing, and legal research. These examples show that Nigeria cannot afford to be left behind if it intends to maintain a modern and competitive justice system.

However, for these benefits to be fully realized, **stakeholders must confront practical, legal, and ethical challenges**. Cost remains a barrier, especially for smaller firms, and the absence of fully digitized case records limits the accuracy of AI tools. There is also a pressing need to bridge the skills gap by integrating legal technology and data literacy into the curriculum of Nigerian law schools. The Paradigm Initiative's AI Governance Report stresses that African countries must urgently develop clear and enforceable legal frameworks to regulate AI use, in order to avoid risks of bias, abuse, and violation of rights.

Going forward, the Nigerian Bar Association, judiciary, and legislature must work together to design a comprehensive AI policy that addresses:

Regulation: Establishing legal standards for transparency, accountability, and liability when AI is used in legal decision-making.

Capacity Building: Supporting continuous professional development for lawyers to use AI tools responsibly and competently.

Infrastructure: Expanding court digitization projects and improving internet and power supply to make AI solutions viable.

Ethical Oversight: Creating guidelines to ensure that AI respects confidentiality, fairness, and human rights in line with the Rules of Professional Conduct 2007.

Most importantly, there must be a balance between innovation and human oversight. AI should **complement not replace human lawyers**. Machines cannot fully replicate human judgment, empathy, or ethical reasoning. When used responsibly, AI can free lawyers from repetitive administrative tasks, enabling them to focus on advocacy, strategy, and the pursuit of justice.

Ultimately, the future of law in Nigeria will be shaped not only by technological innovation but by the choices we make today about how it is used. If Nigeria embraces AI thoughtfully with a strong regulatory framework, ethical safeguards, and investment in local legal tech innovation it can create a legal system that is not only more efficient but also more equitable, transparent, and accessible to all.

REFERENCING

- Stuart Russell and Peter Norvig, *Artificial Intelligence: A Modern Approach* (4th edn, Pearson 2020).
- Dana Remus and Frank S Levy, 'Can Robots Be Lawyers? Computers, Lawyers, and the Practice of Law' (2016) 30(3) *Georgetown Journal of Legal Ethics* 501.
- UNESCO, 'Ethics of Artificial Intelligence' (2023) <https://unesdoc.unesco.org> accessed 19 September 2025.
- Russell and Norvig (n 1).
- Remus and Levy (n 2).
- LawPavilion, 'AI Tools for Nigerian Legal Research' (2023) <https://www.lawpavilion.com> accessed 19 September 2025.
- P Okoli, 'Digital Transformation and the Legal Profession in Nigeria' (2023) 19(2) *Nigerian Law Review* 45.
- Solon Barocas and Andrew D Selbst, 'Big Data's Disparate Impact' (2016) 104 *California Law Review* 671.
- Nigeria Data Protection Act 2023, Part IV.
- Remus and Levy (n 2).

- UNESCO (n 3).
- Rules of Professional Conduct for Legal Practitioners 2007, rr 14 and 15.
- European Parliament, 'Regulation on Artificial Intelligence (AI Act)' COM/2021/206 final.
- OECD, OECD Principles on Artificial Intelligence (2019) <https://oecd.ai> accessed 19 September 2025. Okoli (n 7).
- M Kleiner, 'AI and the Legal Skills Gap: Challenges for 21st Century Lawyers' (2021) 4(1) International Journal of Legal Technology 12.
- D Remus and F Levy (n 2).
- O Ajayi, 'Case Digitization in Nigeria: A Roadmap for the Future' (2022) 7(3) African Journal of Law and Technology 88.
- European Parliament (n 14).
- A Adefulu, 'Legal Tech and the Nigerian Context: Opportunities and Gaps' (2024) 11(1) Journal of Law, Innovation and Society 66.