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ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) AND THE IMPLEMENTATION OF UNIVERSITY POLICY OBJECTIVES IN NIGERIA

BY

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Abstract

University education is a critical stage in Nigeria's educational system, providing a platform for developing individuals into skilled professionals in their chosen fields. It equips graduates with the knowledge, competencies, and expertise required to function effectively and contribute meaningfully to society. The establishment of this level of education is guided by clearly defined policy objectives designed to promote sustainable socio-economic development not only within the country but also in the global context. These policy objectives are clearly articulated in Section 5 (p.41) of the National Policy on Education (2014). Using secondary data obtained through a review of relevant literature, this study explores the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) as a strategic approach to supporting the implementation of university policy objectives in Nigeria. Specifically, it examines how AI can be leveraged to address the persistent challenges that hinder effective policy execution within the Nigerian university system.

Keywords: ***Artificial intelligence, Nigerian university education, Nigerian university, Policy objectives and National policy on education***

Introduction

The origin of university education in Nigeria began in 1948 with University College Ibadan, now the University of Ibadan. Fafunwa (2004) noted that as demand for higher education grew, the Ashby Commission was set up in 1959 to plan post-secondary education. Its recommendations helped shape university expansion. Since then, universities have proliferated across Nigeria, established by the government, religious groups, and private individuals to meet rising educational needs. Ajayi and Ekundayo (2017) highlighted that the Nigerian government saw universities as vital for sustainable development. Following the Ashby Commission's 1962 recommendations, universities like the University of Ife, Ahmadu Bello University, and the University of Lagos were founded to improve access. The University College, Ibadan, was upgraded to a full university during this period. Before the Ashby recommendations, the Eastern Region established the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, in 1960. Between 1960 and 1970, six universities, recognised as Nigeria's first-generation institutions, were founded, including the University of Benin in 1970 by the Midwestern Region (Bendel State).

Seven additional universities were established between 1975 and 1980. These universities were seen as the second-generation universities (University of Calabar, 1975; University of Ilorin, 1976; University of Jos, 1975; University of Sokoto, 1977; University of Maiduguri, 1975; University of Port Harcourt, 1977; and Bayero University, Kano, 1977). Federal Universities of Technology in Akure, Bauchi, Minna, Owerri, and Yola were established between 1980 and the early 1990s as third-generation universities; these universities were established to provide technological development for the country (Ekundayo & Adelakun, 2022). Subsequently, between 1979 and 1983, some State-owned universities were established in Imo, Ondo, Lagos, Akwa Ibom, Oyo and Cross River states (Nwangwu, 2003). From 1991 to the present, the emergence of fourth-generation universities has further expanded the Nigerian higher education landscape. During this period, numerous state-owned institutions were established, alongside the introduction of open and distance learning universities and a significant increase in privately owned universities. These developments have broadened access to higher education and allowed diverse stakeholders to contribute to the sustainable growth of university education in Nigeria (Mustapha et al., 2020).

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University education represents the highest tier of the formal education system, building on foundational and secondary learning to provide advanced knowledge, skills, and critical thinking abilities. It serves as a pivotal stage in human development, equipping individuals with the expertise and competencies required to pursue professional careers and make meaningful contributions to society. Beyond technical proficiency, this level of education fosters intellectual growth, ethical reasoning, and practical problem-solving, preparing graduates to navigate complex societal, economic, and technological challenges while advancing their personal and professional development (Ajape eta al, 2020). It is also designed for adults to prepare them for national socio-economic and technological development (Bodang & Philip, 2021). University education provides individuals with advanced skills and knowledge essential for adapting to the rapidly changing demands of today's world. It equips learners not only with technical expertise but also with critical thinking, problem-solving, and adaptive capabilities, enabling them to navigate complex professional and societal challenges effectively.

The primary objective of university education in Nigeria is to develop the skilled workforce required to drive the country's sustainable development. Universities are designed to produce graduates equipped with relevant knowledge and practical skills that meet the demands of the national economy. Also, to foster technical competence, higher education in Nigeria encourages research, innovation, entrepreneurship, and community engagement, all of which contribute to promoting social cohesion, national progress, and global collaboration (FRN, 2014). University education in Nigeria operates within a framework of clearly defined policy objectives, all of which are ultimately aimed at supporting the country's socioeconomic advancement. These objectives are formally outlined in Section 5, Subsection A of the National Policy on Education, emphasising the role of higher education in producing skilled manpower, fostering innovation, promoting research, and contributing to national development and societal well-being (FRN, 2014).

Artificial Intelligence (AI) refers to computer systems and digital technologies capable of performing tasks that typically require human intelligence, including learning, problem-solving, decision-making, and language processing. Powered by technologies such as machine learning, deep learning, natural language processing, computer vision, and robotics, AI has transformed sectors including education, healthcare, finance, transportation, and agriculture by improving efficiency, innovation, and decision-making (AFSA, 2022). In higher education, AI enhances teaching and learning through personalised instruction, automates administrative processes, supports data-driven decision-making, and improves resource management and student performance monitoring. Its effective adoption, however, depends on institutional leaders possessing the digital competence and ethical awareness required to integrate AI responsibly into university policies and practices (AFSA, 2022; Ogunode & Gregory, 2023).

The effective implementation of university policy objectives depends on the availability and efficient utilisation of human and material resources (Adesua & Adelakun, 2024). However, persistent challenges, including shortages of skilled personnel and inadequate infrastructure, continue to hinder their achievement. Integrating artificial intelligence (AI) into university management can optimise resource utilisation, improve administrative efficiency, and strengthen the implementation of policy objectives. Consequently, exploring AI-driven strategies is essential for enhancing the attainment of university education goals.

Policy Objectives of Nigerian University Education

As stated in Section 5, sub-section A of the National Policies on Education (FRN2014), the following are the policy objectives on Nigerian university education:

University education shall make an optimum contribution to national development by:

(a) intensifying and diversifying its programmes for the development of manpower needed for the sustenance of the national economy;

(b) making professional course contents to reflect our national requirements;

(c) making all students experience all-round development through diversity and general studies such as history of ideas, philosophy of knowledge and nationalism;

(d) engaging in research that will be relevant to the national development goals. In this regard, universities shall be encouraged to give out their research results and findings to both the government and industries;

(e) teaching and inculcating community spirit in the students through projects and research;

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(f) allowing individuals or groups to establish universities, provided they comply with minimum standards as required by the Federal Government;
(g) ensuring that technically-based professional courses in the universities have impactful components, and a relevant future work environment;
(h) necessitating that professional fields in the universities have relevant industrial and professional experience;
(i) seeing that a greater proportion of expenditure on university education is used for science and technology; and
(j) making sure not less than 60% of places are allocated to science and science-oriented courses in the conventional universities, and not less than 80% in the universities of technology, in order to ensure the nation experiences a massive turnaround in the fast-growing technological and science world.
The policy objectives of university education in Nigeria are designed to develop self-reliant graduates who contribute to national economic growth and societal development. Their implementation is overseen by the National Universities Commission (NUC), established in 1962 to regulate and promote the development of Nigerian universities. The NUC advises government on higher education needs, allocates public funding, accredits academic programmes, issues operational licences, regulates student admissions, and monitors institutional compliance with national standards to ensure the attainment of university policy objectives (Ogunode et al., 2021).

Figure 1:



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Figure 1 above illustrates the conceptual relationship between the challenges affecting the implementation of university policy objectives in Nigeria and the transformative role of artificial intelligence (AI). The framework demonstrates how AI-driven interventions enhance teaching, research, governance, resource management, and decision-making, leading to improved policy implementation. With active stakeholder support and continuous feedback, these improvements ultimately contribute to achieving national university policy objectives and promoting sustainable socio-economic development.

Challenges of the Implementation of University Policy Objectives in Nigeria

University education in Nigeria is guided by policy objectives designed to advance the nation's socioeconomic development. Despite these clear goals, their implementation has often been compromised by a range of challenges. These include limited funding, shortages of qualified academic staff, resistance among university personnel to reforms, inadequate infrastructure, corruption, security concerns, pressures from the internationalisation of academic programs, recurrent strike actions, and political interference. Collectively, these factors impede Nigerian universities from fully realising their developmental and educational mandates (Adesua et al., 2024). According to Ibukun (1997), from the outset, university education has encountered several obstacles, including rigid institutional regulations, shortages of qualified staff, limited public awareness and engagement, low student enrolment, and a high rate of student attrition.

Balogun et al. (2025) observed that insufficient funding has significantly impacted the administration of universities in Nigeria. This situation largely stems from the government's failure to allocate adequate resources, with the recommended 26% of the national annual budget for university education, as advised by UNESCO, consistently unmet. The highest budget allocation ever recorded given to the education sector in Nigeria was in 2006, with 10.43%; a percentage which is even far less than half of the recommended 26%. (Oladipo, et al, 2018). This, in the long run, has aided the poor quality of the universities' education in Nigeria (Balogun et al., 2025). The effective implementation of university education policy objectives in Nigeria has been consistently hindered, primarily due to inadequate funding. This financial shortfall is reflected in the persistent lack of essential instructional resources and a shortage of qualified academic and administrative personnel, which undermine the overall quality of higher education in the country. Adelakun and Adebimpe (2021) penned that the most noticeable challenge affecting the management of Nigerian universities is insufficient funding.

In recent years, Nigerian universities have experienced a noticeable shortage of qualified staff, a situation that has contributed to an increased rate of brain drain within the higher education sector. This shortage has directly impacted the effective implementation of university policies, as the limited human resources struggle to meet the academic and administrative demands required to sustain quality education and institutional growth. According to Okebukola (2018), universities in Nigeria are short of about 30% in terms of staff strength, which has affected the productivity level of university education in Nigeria because there is inadequate implementation of university policies. The decline in university staff numbers appears to stem largely from the persistent migration of qualified personnel to Europe and other regions in pursuit of better professional opportunities and improved living conditions. This ongoing exodus of talent, often referred to as "brain drain," has weakened the human resource capacity of Nigerian universities and hindered the effective execution of academic and administrative responsibilities. This move in search of a better life is termed 'Japa' in Nigeria; *Japa syndrome* has affected a lot of sectors in the country. Unfortunately, the rate of recruitment to fill vacant positions remains low, leaving the existing university staff with an excessive workload, which has, in turn, contributed to reduced productivity and efficiency within the higher education system.

Adequate facilities are needed for the effective implementation of university policy objectives. According to Owoeye (2021), the availability and adequacy of school facilities are strong variables in the implementation of university policy objectives in Nigeria. Unfortunately, there seems to be a shortage of facilities in the university. Ekundayo (2012) examined the influence of school facilities on students' achievement in both the affective and psychomotor domains of learning. The findings indicated that the available school facilities were generally inadequate. Despite this, students demonstrated good performance in the affective and psychomotor domains. Moreover, the study revealed a significant correlation between the adequacy of school facilities and

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students' achievement in the affective domain, as well as a significant relationship between school facilities and performance in the psychomotor domain.

Corruption represents a major obstacle to the effective implementation of university policy objectives in Nigeria, significantly undermining the productivity of higher education. This challenge is evident in the mismanagement and diversion of funds and resources intended for universities. Manifestations of corruption in Nigerian universities include practices such as money laundering, inflating contract costs, procuring substandard equipment, constructing non-compliant buildings, embezzlement, falsifying data, bribery, failure to remit taxes and other statutory dues, and the presence of ghost workers on payrolls. These corrupt practices collectively hinder the achievement of educational goals and compromise the quality of university education in the country (Ahmodu & Sofoluwe, 2018). Adelakun (2021) corroborated this by noting that numerous instances of fund misappropriation have been reported in Nigerian universities, particularly regarding the procurement of facilities. In several cases, university personnel diverted resources allocated for institutional development for personal gain, sometimes to such an extent that officials made absurd claims of lost funds, including money allegedly swallowed by monkeys or snakes.

Over the years, politics and political instability in Nigeria have significantly impacted the smooth execution of university policy objectives. Decisions regarding university policies, budgeting, procurement processes, allocation of resources, staffing, and the establishment of new institutions are frequently shaped or influenced by political considerations, often hindering the intended outcomes of higher education policies. According to Adelakun and Olorunsola (2024), separating politics from the implementation of university policy objectives in Nigeria is often challenging, as political influence has historically had more detrimental than beneficial effects on education policies.

The persistent incorporation of foreign practices into Nigerian universities has, over time, resulted in the marginalisation of indigenous approaches to managing higher education. The adoption of British curricula, teaching methodologies, and administrative strategies, while offering some benefits, has often overshadowed local practices and weakened the effectiveness of traditional methods for achieving the objectives of university education in Nigeria. Consequently, the reliance on imported systems has sometimes hindered the full realisation of policy goals that are tailored to the country's unique educational, cultural, and socio-economic contexts. Adesua et al (2024) penned that the full-scale internationalisation of university education in Nigeria risks the erosion of indigenous cultural values. A secure and peaceful university environment is essential for the effective implementation of university policy objectives in Nigeria. However, rising insecurity, including banditry, insurgency, cult activities, and other criminal acts, continues to disrupt academic and administrative operations. These security challenges have resulted in loss of lives and property, reduced student enrolment, interrupted academic activities, and, in some cases, temporary institutional closure, thereby undermining the achievement of university policy objectives and national development goals (Adelakun et al., 2024).

Frequent and prolonged strike actions by university staff have repeatedly disrupted academic activities in Nigerian universities and hindered the timely implementation of educational policy objectives. These industrial actions, often triggered by unresolved disputes over funding, conditions of service, and government agreements, have resulted in extended academic calendars and lost instructional time, negatively affecting both teaching and learning outcomes. Recent evidence shows that strikes continue to undermine the credibility and stability of the higher education system, disrupting students' progress and diminishing institutional productivity. The challenges identified in the implementation of policy objectives in Nigerian universities may partly stem from the limited adoption of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies. The integration of AI could enhance efficiency, optimise resource management, and streamline administrative processes, thereby supporting the effective realisation of universities' policy goals. By leveraging AI, universities could better monitor academic progress, manage human and material resources, and ensure the timely execution of programs aligned with their strategic objectives.

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Implementation of University Policy Objectives in Nigeria via AI

The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) can strengthen university academic programmes and support the development of the skilled workforce required for national economic growth. AI enhances curriculum delivery through personalised learning, adaptive instruction, and efficient resource utilisation, thereby improving programmes in areas such as digital literacy, leadership, and citizenship education. Consequently, AI facilitates the effective implementation of manpower development initiatives and advances university policy objectives. Ogunode, Edinoh, and Okolie (2023) noted that AI can address several challenges affecting teaching programmes in Nigerian universities. As teaching remains central to achieving higher education objectives (Oladele, 2026), AI can support lecturers in designing instructional materials, delivering engaging content, and improving student assessment, thereby enhancing teaching quality and learning outcomes.

Effective implementation of these teaching practices ensures that students acquire the necessary knowledge, skills, and competencies to meet societal and economic demands. The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into university teaching and learning activities can significantly enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of academic processes. AI technologies can be utilised to automate routine tasks such as grading, generating and presenting students' results, and managing other administrative aspects of the academic workflow. By delegating these time-consuming tasks to AI systems, lecturers can devote more attention to instructional delivery, student engagement, and curriculum development, ultimately improving the overall quality and productivity of teaching and learning in Nigerian universities (Chen et al., 2020; Borbajo et al., 2023). To make students experience all-round development via diversity and general studies, such as the history of ideas, philosophy of knowledge, and nationalism, AI can be used to develop learning in the university. According to Bordia (2023), universities can use AI-powered chatbots to provide uninterrupted learning to students. Chatbots can be used by university management to provide needed information to students and also feedback to parents. For example, information about fees, admissions requirements and lists, course outlines, time of lectures and lecturers-in-charge can be made available to stakeholders in university education using AI-powered chatbots.

Academic staff in Nigerian universities are required to conduct research that aligns with the broader objectives of national development. The insights and findings generated from such research are intended to guide government policies and inform stakeholders in planning strategies for sustainable development across the country. As noted by Adelakun et al. (2025), university academics are expected to remain current, adaptable, and resourceful, possessing up-to-date knowledge in their respective fields to ensure high-quality performance in their roles. Access to the latest research, publications, and relevant information is essential for lecturers to provide accurate and informed instruction, thereby enhancing the learning experience and ensuring students are equipped with contemporary knowledge and skills. To maximise these benefits, academic staff should remain proficient in emerging AI technologies to enhance research productivity and scholarly publishing. Khedkar (2023) observed that AI tools can support the preparation of journal articles, book chapters, textbooks, and other academic outputs by improving clarity, refining language, and correcting grammatical and stylistic errors. Integrating AI into research and academic writing therefore enhances efficiency, improves publication quality, and enables lecturers to focus on producing innovative and impactful scholarship.

Researchers can also make use of AI in analysing data from conducted experiments and research even more efficiently. This can help researchers from time to time in using analogue/manual methods of data analysis. AI-powered research tools can help in gathering related information to explain a concept in detail. University researchers can also make use of AI-powered machines to cite and arrange related literatures/references in write-ups. To support the policy objective of increasing investment in science and technology, universities can leverage AI to improve financial management, reduce wastage, and enhance accountability. AI-powered systems can automate fund allocation, detect fraud, manage debt, and streamline the administration of student loans, bursaries, and other financial aid. They can also provide students with timely information on funding opportunities, eligibility, application procedures, and repayment requirements. By automating these processes, AI reduces administrative workload while improving transparency, efficiency, and accountability in university financial management (Adesiji, 2024).

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Conclusion

It has been established that integrating artificial intelligence into the implementation of university policy objectives in Nigeria is crucial. Consequently, the successful realisation and sustainability of these policies depend heavily on the active participation of all stakeholders in the university system. Without their engagement and commitment to adopting AI technologies, achieving the intended outcomes of university education policies may remain elusive. The importance of artificial intelligence (AI) in implementing university policy objectives in Nigeria cannot be overstated. As the world increasingly relies on digital and computerised systems to address everyday and emerging challenges, university education must also integrate these technological advancements to remain relevant and efficient. The achievement and sustainability of university policies depend on the active engagement of all stakeholders, academic staff, administrators, students, and policymakers in adopting AI-driven solutions. Failing to embrace this shift risks undermining the effectiveness of university education, limiting its ability to contribute meaningfully to national development and to prepare graduates for the demands of a rapidly evolving global economy.

Suggestions

Given the realities above, the following suggestions were made:

1. **Federal and State Governments:** Develop and implement comprehensive policies that support the ethical adoption of artificial intelligence in Nigerian universities through sustained investment in digital infrastructure, funding, and regulatory frameworks to strengthen the implementation of university policy objectives in Nigeria.
2. **University Management:** Institutionalise AI-driven administrative and academic systems by investing in digital infrastructure, establishing governance frameworks, and providing continuous technical support to enhance the effective implementation of university policy objectives in Nigeria.
3. **Policy Makers and University Administrators:** Leverage AI-enabled data analytics to strengthen institutional planning, resource allocation, quality assurance, and evidence-based decision-making, thereby improving the achievement of university policy objectives in Nigeria.
4. **Parents:** Support students in the responsible and ethical use of AI-enabled learning technologies by promoting digital literacy and adherence to institutional guidelines, thereby contributing to the attainment of university policy objectives in Nigeria.
5. **Community and Industry Partners:** Collaborate with universities through partnerships, technology transfer, capacity-building initiatives, and resource support to strengthen AI adoption and innovation, thereby enhancing the implementation of university policy objectives in Nigeria.

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