
LEGAL AND ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS OF INTEGRATING ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE TOOLS IN TEACHING BASIC LAW COURSES IN NIGERIAN POLYTECHNICS

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the legal and ethical implications of integrating Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools in teaching Basic Law courses in Nigerian polytechnics. The rapid adoption of educational technologies in Nigerian tertiary institutions, accelerated since the COVID-19 pandemic, has seen AI-powered platforms become increasingly prevalent in legal education. The article adopts a multidisciplinary analytical framework combining educational theory, legal analysis, and ethical philosophy to evaluate the implications of AI integration in teaching Basic Law courses. It identifies five key areas of concern: (1) compliance with Nigerian educational regulations and data protection laws; (2) ethical considerations in automated assessment and feedback; (3) algorithmic bias and its impact on legal pedagogy; (4) intellectual property rights in AI-generated legal analysis; and (5) the development of professional legal competencies in an AI-mediated learning environment. The analysis draws on Nigerian legislation (Constitution 1999, Nigeria Data Protection Act 2023, Copyright Act), polytechnic regulations (NBTE guidelines), judicial decisions, and comparative international frameworks. Findings indicate that while AI tools offer significant pedagogical benefits including personalised learning and improved accessibility, their unregulated integration raises substantial concerns regarding academic integrity, privacy violations, and the potential erosion of critical legal reasoning skills. The article concludes with recommendations for a regulatory framework and institutional policies that balance innovation with ethical safeguards, ensuring that AI integration enhances rather than undermines the quality of legal education in Nigerian polytechnics.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, legal education, Nigerian polytechnics, data protection, algorithmic bias, legal ethics, educational technology, Nigeria Data Protection Act

1. INTRODUCTION

The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in educational environments exemplifies one of the most significant pedagogical transformations of the 21st century. In Nigerian polytechnics, which offer National Diploma (ND) and Higher National Diploma (HND) programmes in Legal Drafting and related disciplines, the adoption of AI tools for teaching Basic Law courses has accelerated dramatically since 2015 (Adewumi, 2022). This trend intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced a rapid digital transition across Nigeria's educational sector (Nwankwo, 2021). Basic Law courses – covering fundamental legal principles, the Nigerian legal system, constitutional law, contract law, and law of torts – form the foundation of legal education in polytechnics and are particularly susceptible to AI integration through tools such as intelligent tutoring systems, automated assessment platforms, and legal research assistants.

The National Board for Technical Education (NBTE), which regulates polytechnic education in Nigeria, has increasingly emphasised digital literacy and technology integration in curriculum development (NBTE, 2020). However, existing regulatory frameworks have not kept pace with the specific challenges posed by AI technologies in legal education. This gap creates significant legal and ethical uncertainties that this article seeks to address.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Despite the growing prevalence of AI tools in Nigerian polytechnic law classrooms, there exists no comprehensive legal or ethical framework to guide their use. This regulatory lacuna has resulted in inconsistent practices, potential violations of data protection laws, unresolved questions of academic integrity, and risks to the development of essential professional legal competencies. Furthermore, the absence of clear guidelines exposes institutions and educators to potential liability while leaving students uncertain about the boundaries of acceptable AI-assisted work.

1.2 Research Questions

This article addresses the following questions:

- i. What are the applicable legal frameworks governing AI integration in Nigerian polytechnic education?
- ii. What ethical challenges arise from the use of AI tools in teaching Basic Law courses?
- iii. How can Nigerian polytechnics balance pedagogical innovation with legal compliance and ethical responsibility?

1.3 Scope and Methodology

The article adopts a doctrinal legal research methodology, analysing Nigerian legislation (Constitution 1999, Nigeria Data Protection Act 2023, Copyright Act, NITDA Act 2007), regulations (NBTE guidelines), judicial decisions, and polytechnic policies alongside empirical data from surveys of 15 Nigerian polytechnics conducted between 2023 and 2025. The temporal scope (2015–present) captures the period of most rapid AI adoption in Nigerian education.

2. LEGAL FRAMEWORK GOVERNING AI IN NIGERIAN EDUCATION

2.1 Constitutional and Statutory Provisions

The Nigerian legal system provides several constitutional and statutory provisions that implicitly or explicitly impact AI integration in education:

Right to Education – Section 18, Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (as amended): While the directive principles in Chapter II are not justiciable, this provision supports technological innovations that enhance educational access. However, AI implementation must not create new barriers to education through digital divides (Akanle, 2023).

Nigeria Data Protection Act (NDPA) 2023: This landmark legislation establishes comprehensive data protection standards that directly impact educational AI systems collecting and processing student data. Section 26 specifically addresses automated decision-making, requiring transparency and human oversight – provisions with significant implications for AI-driven assessment in law courses (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2023).

National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA) Act 2007: Under this Act, NITDA has issued the National Artificial Intelligence Policy (2022), which emphasises ethical AI development but lacks specific provisions for educational contexts (NITDA, 2022). The proposed Nigeria AI Regulation Bill (2024) is currently under consideration and may address this gap.

2.2 Educational Regulations

National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) Act: The NBTE's *Curriculum and Course Specifications for Legal Studies* (2018) emphasises practical skills but contains no specific provisions regarding AI tools. This regulatory gap creates uncertainty regarding the acceptability of AI-assisted work in assessments (NBTE, 2018). The NBTE's *Digital Literacy Framework for Technical Education* (2020) encourages technology integration but does not address the unique challenges of AI in legal pedagogy.

Polytechnic-Specific Policies: Leading institutions such as Yaba College of Technology and Federal Polytechnic, Nekede have developed e-learning policies (2019–2021) that implicitly address AI tools, but these remain fragmented and lack legal sophistication (Survey of Polytechnic Policies, 2023).

2.3 Copyright and Intellectual Property Law

The Copyright Act (Cap C28, LFN 2004) raises complex questions regarding AI-generated legal analysis in educational settings. The landmark case of *Microsoft Corporation v. Franike Associates Ltd* (2018) 13 NWLR (Pt. 1635) 165 established principles on software copyright that have implications for educational AI tools. Additionally, the unresolved question of whether AI-generated content qualifies for copyright protection under Nigerian law creates uncertainties for both educators and students (Oguamanam, 2021). The proposed Copyright

Amendment Bill presently before the National Assembly may address AI-generated works but has not yet been enacted.

3. ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS IN LEGAL PEDAGOGY

3.1 Academic Integrity and Assessment

AI integration challenges traditional conceptions of academic integrity in legal education. Tools such as Turnitin's AI writing detection and customised legal analysis checkers are increasingly used in Nigerian polytechnics. A 2023 study at Federal Polytechnic, Ilaro found that 68% of law lecturers used some form of AI-assisted grading, despite concerns about algorithmic fairness in evaluating legal arguments (Olaniyi, 2023). AI platforms that generate draft legal documents (e.g., contract drafting simulations) provide valuable practical exercises but risk encouraging procedural compliance over substantive understanding. The ethical balance between skill development and over-reliance requires careful calibration (Eze, 2022).

The case of *University of Lagos v. Student Disciplinary Committee* (2021) UNILAG/ADM/DC/45, while not specifically about AI, established principles regarding technological evidence in academic misconduct cases that are increasingly relevant as AI detection tools become more prevalent.

3.2 Algorithmic Bias and Legal Education

AI systems trained on predominantly Western legal databases may embed biases that conflict with Nigeria's pluralistic legal system, which comprises common law, customary law, and Sharia law. A 2022 analysis of widely used legal AI research tools found they contained less than 5% African legal sources, potentially marginalising Nigerian legal principles (Akinola & Balogun, 2022). In teaching constitutional law, AI systems emphasising individual rights might inadequately address communitarian values embedded in Nigerian constitutionalism, particularly regarding Chapter II's Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy (Nwabueze, 2020).

3.3 Professional Competency Development

Legal education in polytechnics aims to develop paralegals, court clerks, and legal assistants with practical competencies. Over-reliance on AI tools risks undermining:

- **Critical Legal Reasoning:** The distinctive skill of analogical reasoning in common law systems may atrophy if students primarily interact with algorithmic legal analysis (Smith, 2019).
- **Ethical Judgment:** AI cannot model the nuanced ethical decision-making required in legal practice, particularly regarding client confidentiality and conflict of interest – core topics in Basic Law courses (Ibrahim, 2021).

4. DATA PROTECTION AND PRIVACY CONCERNS

4.1 Compliance with Nigeria Data Protection Act 2023

The implementation of the NDPA 2023 has significant implications for educational AI:

- **Lawful Basis for Processing:** Section 25 requires explicit lawful bases for processing student data. The commonly invoked “legitimate interest” basis may be insufficient for sensitive data processed by adaptive learning systems (Adeoye, 2024).
- **Data Protection Impact Assessments (DPIAs):** Section 28 mandates DPIAs for high-risk processing, which would include AI systems making automated decisions about student performance or recommending educational pathways.
- **Cross-Border Data Transfers:** Many educational AI tools are hosted offshore, raising compliance issues with Section 41's restrictions on international data transfers (Bello, 2023).

4.2 Informed Consent in Educational Settings

The power imbalance in educational institutions complicates genuine informed consent. A 2023 survey of polytechnic students found that 82% agreed to AI tool terms without reading them, primarily due to perceived academic pressure (Student Digital Rights Survey, 2023). This raises ethical questions about autonomy that are particularly salient in legal education, where understanding consent is a core learning objective.

5. CASE STUDIES FROM NIGERIAN POLYTECHNICS

5.1 AI Integration at Kaduna Polytechnic

Kaduna Polytechnic's 2021 pilot of an AI-powered legal research assistant for HND Law students demonstrated both benefits and challenges:

- **Positive outcomes:** 40% improvement in research efficiency and increased engagement with primary legal sources (Kaduna Polytechnic Report, 2022).
- **Legal challenges:** Copyright infringement concerns arose when the system reproduced substantial excerpts from Nigerian Law Reports without proper licensing.
- **Ethical issues:** Students' over-reliance on AI-generated case summaries led to surface-level understanding of legal principles.

➤ 5.2 Virtual Moot Court Platform at Auchi Polytechnic

- The 2022 implementation of an AI-judged moot court platform revealed:
- **Pedagogical benefits:** Increased participation and objective scoring of legal arguments (Auchi Polytechnic Evaluation, 2023).
- **Algorithmic limitations:** The system struggled with evaluating customary law arguments, highlighting the cultural specificity of legal reasoning.

- **Data privacy issues:** Recording of student performances raised concerns under the NDPA 2023, particularly regarding biometric data in speech analysis.

6. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS: LESSONS FROM OTHER JURISDICTIONS

6.1 United Kingdom's Approach

The UK's Data Protection Act 2018 and the *Education (Educational Institutions) Regulations* provide specific guidelines for educational data processing that could inform Nigerian policy. The case of *R (Bridges) v Chief Constable of South Wales Police* (2020) EWCA Civ 1058, while concerning police use of AI, established important principles regarding algorithmic transparency that apply to educational contexts (Ukwueze, 2023).

6.2 South African Framework

South Africa's Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA) 2013 and the *National Guidelines for AI in Education* (2021) offer a developing model for balancing innovation with protection, particularly regarding historically disadvantaged institutions – a relevant consideration for Nigeria's educational equity concerns (Mbao & Kabau, 2022).

6.3 UNESCO Guidance

UNESCO's *AI and Education: Guidance for Policymakers* (2021) and its *Beijing Consensus on Artificial Intelligence and Education* (2019) provide internationally recognised principles that Nigeria can adapt, including the imperative of human-centred AI, the need for teacher training, and the importance of addressing digital divides (UNESCO, 2019, 2021).

7. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

Based on the analysis, this article proposes a multi-level framework for responsible AI integration:

7.1 Regulatory Level

The NBTE should develop *Guidelines for AI Integration in Legal Education* addressing:

- i. Standards for algorithmic transparency in assessment tools;
- ii. Requirements for Nigerian legal content in AI training datasets;
- iii. Protocols for data protection compliance under the NDPA 2023;
- iv. Minimum AI literacy competencies for both educators and students.

The National Universities Commission (NUC) and NBTE should collaborate on cross-sectoral standards, given the similarity of legal education challenges across institution types.

7.2 Institutional Level

Polytechnics should:

- i. **Establish AI Ethics Committees** with representation from law units/departments, IT, student bodies, and external legal practitioners.
- ii. **Develop AI Literacy Modules** as mandatory components of Basic Law courses, teaching students to critically evaluate AI-generated legal analysis.
- iii. **Implement Transparency Protocols** requiring disclosure of AI tools used in teaching and assessment, with clear rubrics for acceptable use.

7.3 Pedagogical Level

Educators should:

- i. **Design AI-augmented rather than AI-driven** learning experiences that emphasise human-AI collaboration in legal problem-solving.
- ii. **Develop assessment methods** that evaluate AI competency alongside traditional legal skills, recognising AI proficiency as an emerging professional requirement.
- iii. **Create contextualised AI tools** trained on Nigerian legal materials, potentially through collaborative projects between polytechnics and legal tech startups.

7.4 Legal Framework Enhancements

Policymakers should:

- i. **Amend NBTE regulations** to explicitly address AI in legal education, including provisions for academic integrity in AI-assisted work.
- ii. **Expedite the AI Regulation Bill** to provide comprehensive governance for AI deployment in all educational sectors.
- iii. **Issue NITDA guidelines** specifically tailored to educational AI, including mandatory algorithmic impact assessments.

8. CONCLUSION

The integration of AI tools in teaching Basic Law courses in Nigerian polytechnics presents both unprecedented opportunities and significant legal and ethical challenges. Since 2015, adoption has accelerated, yet regulatory frameworks have lagged behind technological developments. The Nigeria Data Protection Act 2023 provides a crucial foundation for addressing privacy concerns, but specialised guidance for educational contexts remains inadequate.

Ethically, the core challenge lies in balancing efficiency gains with the preservation of essential legal competencies. AI should augment rather than replace the development of critical legal reasoning, ethical judgment, and contextual understanding of Nigeria's pluralistic legal system. The risk of algorithmic bias and cultural insensitivity in globally

trained AI systems requires particular attention in legal education, where understanding local jurisprudence is paramount.

As Nigerian polytechnics continue to integrate AI tools, a proactive, principle-based approach is essential. By developing appropriate regulations, institutional policies, and pedagogical strategies, Nigeria can harness AI's potential to enhance legal education while safeguarding academic integrity, student rights, and the quality of legal training. The decisions made in this formative period will significantly influence whether AI serves as a tool for educational empowerment or a source of new inequities and ethical compromises in Nigerian legal education.

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