



SUSTAINABLE EDUCATION IN AFRICA

Peer Reviewed Book Chapter



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Cover Title	
Editorial Board Members	iii
Acknowledgement	iv
Contributing Authors	v
Table of Contents	vi
<i>Concluding Synthesis</i>	163
<i>Implications for Practice</i>	164
<i>Editors' Note</i>	165

1	ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND EDUCATIONAL PLANNING IN NIGERIA: PROSPECTS, CHALLENGES, AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT	1
	<i>UDEGBE Chigozie Charles</i>	
2	DIGITALIZATION AND EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT IN NIGERIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR ADMINISTRATIVE EFFICIENCY, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND SUSTAINABLE EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT	16
	<i>OLOFINKUA Vincent Kayode, (Ph.D)</i> <i>ONAFOWOPE Mary Adesola, (Ph.D)</i> <i>OWEIKPODOR Vera Gbaeprekumo (Ph.D)</i>	
3	PAPERLESS EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM IN NIGERIA: PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS	29
	<i>AWADIEGWU Amaka Emmanuela</i>	
4	CIRCULAR ECONOMY AND THE NIGERIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM: OPPORTUNITIES, CHALLENGES, AND PATHWAYS FOR SUSTAINABLE EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT	40
	<i>NWANKWO Nkechi Chinelo (Ph.D)</i>	
5	STRATEGIES TO PROMOTE GENDER EQUALITY IN NIGERIAN SCHOOLS	52
	<i>EDOR Job John</i>	
6	ECONOMIC HARDSHIPS AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR ACCESS, QUALITY, AND EQUITY IN THE NIGERIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM	63
	<i>UGWUNNAMCHI Uchenna Jacinta Ph.D</i>	

7	BANDITRY AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR ACCESS, SAFETY, AND EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA <i>UNACHUKWU Ijeoma Blessing (Ph.D)</i>	74
8	INNOVATION, EDUCATION AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT <i>ONAFOWOPE Mary Adesola, (Ph. D)</i> <i>OLOFINKUA Vincent Kayode, Ph.d)</i> <i>OWEIKPODOR Vera Gbaeprekumo (Ph.D)</i>	83
9	CHALLENGES FACING INNOVATION EDUCATION IN NIGERIA <i>UGHENU, Nwamaka Perpetua</i>	94
10	THE ROLE OF EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY IN ENHANCING LEARNING AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT <i>EKE, Ben Ethel, (Ph.D).</i>	107
11	EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND TEACHERS' JOB PERFORMANCE IN NIGERIAN SCHOOLS: STRATEGIES FOR EFFECTIVE EMOTIONAL MANAGEMENT <i>ORANUSI Ndid Stella.</i>	115
12	EVALUATING THE BENEFITS OF THE FG ASUU AGREEMENT PACT 2026 IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF UNIVERSITIES IN NIGERIA <i>Victor Olugbenga AYOKO</i>	126
13	CURRICULUM IMPLEMENTATION IN NIGERIAN SCHOOLS: CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS <i>Salihu, Habibat Atti (Ph.D)</i> <i>Dr. Rauf Olaiya SARAFADEN</i>	137
14	ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AS A TOOL FOR ENHANCING TRANSPARENCY AND MERITOCRACY IN THE SELECTION OF PRINCIPAL OFFICERS IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES. <i>Niyi Jacob OGUNODE – (Ph.D)</i>	151



14

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AS A TOOL FOR ENHANCING TRANSPARENCY AND MERITOCRACY IN THE SELECTION OF PRINCIPAL OFFICERS IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES.

By

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Abstract

The chapter discussed the Artificial Intelligence as a Tool for Enhancing Transparency and Meritocracy in the Selection of Principal Officers in Nigerian Universities. The Chapter study concluded that the integration of AI into the selection process of Principals officers of the universities in Nigeria will enhance transparency and meritocracy in the selection of principal officers in Nigerian universities. Artificial intelligence provides a practical and innovative pathway for enhancing the selection process of principal officers in Nigerian universities. By standardizing criteria, reducing bias, improving transparency, supporting evidence-based decisions, and strengthening accountability mechanisms, AI can significantly mitigate the crises associated with leadership selection. Based on these findings, the chapter recommends that the Federal Ministry of Education, in collaboration with the National Universities Commission (NUC), should develop a standardized AI-guided framework for the selection of principal officers in Nigerian universities. This framework should clearly define selection criteria, evaluation indicators, and ethical guidelines to ensure uniformity, transparency, and compliance across federal, state, and private universities. Artificial intelligence should be integrated strictly as a decision-support system rather than a substitute for governing councils and selection committees. Final appointment decisions



should remain the responsibility of statutory bodies, with AI-generated assessments serving as objective inputs to guide deliberations and reduce subjectivity.

Keywords: Principals' officers, University system, Selection process

1.0 Introduction

The selection of principal officers such as Vice-Chancellors, Deputy Vice-Chancellors, Registrars, and Bursars in Nigerian universities has increasingly been characterized by crises, controversies, and allegations of undue interference. These crises often stem from perceived lack of transparency, politicization of the selection process, favoritism, ethnic considerations, and non-adherence to established guidelines. As a result, the credibility of university governance structures has been questioned, leading to internal conflicts, litigation, staff unrest, and disruptions in academic activities. Such challenges undermine institutional stability and weaken the capacity of universities to effectively fulfill their mandates of teaching, research, and community service.

In recent years, advances in artificial intelligence (AI) have transformed decision-making processes across various sectors by promoting objectivity, efficiency, and accountability. AI technologies offer data-driven tools capable of analyzing candidates' qualifications, experience, performance records, and leadership competencies based on predefined criteria. When properly designed and ethically deployed, AI systems can minimize human bias, enhance compliance with regulatory frameworks, and ensure merit-based selection processes. In the context of Nigerian universities, the integration of AI into the selection of principal officers presents a promising approach to addressing long-standing governance challenges.

This paper argues that the adoption of artificial intelligence in the selection of principal officers can significantly reduce crises associated with the process by strengthening transparency, fairness, and institutional trust. By automating key aspects of evaluation and providing auditable decision trails, AI can support governing councils and selection committees in making informed and objective decisions. Consequently, the study underscores the potential of AI as a governance innovation capable of reforming leadership selection processes and promoting sustainable university administration in Nigeria.

2.0 Conceptual Terms

2.1 Concept of University

A university is an institution of higher education that offers undergraduate and graduate degrees in various fields of study. It provides students with opportunities to further their academic knowledge



and develop their skills through lectures, seminars, research projects, and practical experiences. Universities also offer a range of services and resources to support students, such as career counseling, financial aid, and extracurricular activities. A university is a higher education institution that offers various academic programs and degrees. It typically consists of multiple colleges or schools, each focused on a different area of study, such as business, medicine, or engineering. Universities are responsible for conducting research and providing students with a broad range of academic resources and opportunities, such as internships, study abroad programs, and student organizations. Students attend universities to gain knowledge and skills in their chosen field, and ultimately earn a degree that can lead to career opportunities (Ogunode, 2026).

University management involves planning, organizing, coordinating, and controlling academic and administrative activities to achieve institutional goals. AI applications in university management help administrators handle large volumes of data, reduce human bias, improve transparency, and enhance operational efficiency. Key areas of application include admissions management, student records, financial management, performance evaluation, security, and human resource management. The realization of university' management depends on the quality of leadership such as the principals' officers.

2.2 Concept of Principals Officers

Principal officers of universities in Nigeria are the top management officials responsible for the overall administration, leadership, and governance of the university system. They occupy statutory positions created by university laws, statutes, and regulations, and they play critical roles in ensuring the effective functioning, stability, and development of universities in line with national educational goals and global best practices.

These officers collectively provide strategic direction, implement policies approved by the Governing Council and Senate, manage human and material resources, and uphold academic standards and institutional integrity. Their roles are essential to achieving the core mandates of universities, which include teaching, research, and community service.

Major Principal Officers of Universities in Nigeria

Vice-Chancellor (VC)

The Vice-Chancellor is the chief executive and academic head of the university. He or she is responsible for the day-to-day administration of the institution and for implementing policies and decisions of the Governing Council and the Senate. The Vice-Chancellor provides academic leadership, promotes research and innovation, ensures discipline, and represents the university in



external relations. In Nigerian universities, the Vice-Chancellor is usually appointed by the Governing Council for a fixed tenure, subject to relevant laws and regulations.

Deputy Vice-Chancellors (DVCs)

Deputy Vice-Chancellors assist the Vice-Chancellor in the administration of the university. They are often assigned specific portfolios such as Academic Affairs, Administration, Research, or Development. The DVCs act on behalf of the Vice-Chancellor when delegated and help coordinate academic and administrative activities to ensure smooth operations across faculties and departments.

Registrar

The Registrar is the chief administrative officer of the university. He or she is responsible for managing personnel matters, student records, admissions processes, and general administrative services. The Registrar also serves as the secretary to key governing bodies such as the Governing Council, Senate, Congregation, and Convocation, ensuring proper documentation and compliance with university statutes.

Bursar

The Bursar is the chief financial officer of the university. The office is responsible for managing the institution's finances, including budgeting, accounting, financial reporting, and internal control systems. The Bursar ensures prudent use of funds, transparency, and accountability in line with government financial regulations and university policies.

University Librarian

The University Librarian is the head of the university library system and is responsible for the acquisition, organization, and dissemination of information resources to support teaching, learning, and research. The Librarian also oversees the development of digital library services and ensures access to up-to-date academic materials

Principal officers play a central role in university governance by ensuring effective leadership, accountability, and coordination among various units of the institution. They help maintain academic standards, promote efficient resource management, ensure compliance with regulatory bodies such as the National Universities Commission (NUC), and foster a conducive environment for learning and research (Abdullahi, 2016)..

The university, as a microcosm of society and purveyor of the finest intellectual values, is critical to nurturing society with developmental ideals and striking innovations. And as the principal



academic and administrative officer of a university, the tasks of a vice chancellor involve providing leadership, academic and administrative, to the entire university community; representing the university externally, both within the country and overseas; securing a financial base sufficient to allow the delivery of its mission, aims and objectives and carrying out important ceremonial and civic duties. A university should be a promoter of merit and a symbol of it. It is neither for ethnicity, nepotism or national culture of sharing where the establishment of one is hinged on geographical spread. A university is imbued with internal mechanisms to identify threats and solve crises. The appointment of vice-chancellors in many public universities is often hinged on selection based on the primal sentiments and influences of powerbrokers. Merit is pathetically ensnared, and the VC handpicked based on politics and nepotism, exploiting the divisive tendencies among staff and management without tangible attention to academic and administrative acumen. Wrangling, litigation and pettiness have unseated quality research, teaching and training, the hallmarks of university education. (Daniel-Kalioi, 2019; Bimpe, 2025)

2.1 Selection process of Principals Officers

This depends on the type of university federal, state or private as well as the type of private university secular, faith-based and hybrid. Another factor is whether the appointment is for a pioneer vice-chancellor or a successor. The standard in federal and state universities is that pioneer vice-chancellors are appointed by fiat by the Visitor. The Visitor is usually the president of Nigeria or the governor of a state for public universities.

It is the Proprietor for private universities. For subsequent appointments, a vacancy is declared – in a newspaper advertisement six months before the end of the tenure of the incumbent. Conditions are stated in the advertisement, which include number of years of post-professorial qualification, academic and administrative qualifications, and experience in various other capacities. At the close of the deadline for submission, candidates are shortlisted. Interviews can take place in different formats, depending on tradition or the preference of the Visitor, board of trustees or governing council. Although this system worked seamlessly in previous years, it has come under strain in recent times. The problem is that the corrupt hand of operators can disrupt any system. (Olukaju , & Fatade , (2021).

2.3 Concept of Artificial Intelligence

Artificial Intelligence (AI) refers to the branch of computer science concerned with the development of machines and systems capable of performing tasks that normally require human intelligence. These tasks include learning, reasoning, problem-solving, decision-making, pattern recognition, language understanding, and data analysis. AI systems are designed to simulate human cognitive abilities by using algorithms, machine learning, natural language processing, and



data-driven models to improve efficiency and accuracy over time. In the context of organizations, including universities, Artificial intelligence (AI) refers to computer-based technologies designed to perform tasks that normally require human intelligence, such as learning, reasoning, data analysis, and decision support. AI systems use algorithms and large datasets to identify patterns, make predictions, and support informed decision-making. In the context of higher education, AI is increasingly recognized as a strategic tool for improving efficiency, transparency, and effectiveness in university management. (Ogunode & Olowonefa 2023)

In university management, AI can support administrative decision-making by analyzing large volumes of institutional data related to students, staff, finance, and academic performance. For example, AI-driven systems can improve admissions management, staff recruitment and promotion, resource allocation, and performance monitoring by providing data-driven insights. This reduces manual workload, minimizes errors, and enhances operational efficiency. (Ogunode, & Gregory, 2023).

AI can also promote transparency and accountability in governance processes. Through standardized evaluation tools and digital audit trails, AI helps reduce bias and subjectivity in areas such as leadership selection, staff appraisal, and policy implementation. Additionally, predictive analytics can assist university managers in planning for student enrollment trends, budgeting, and infrastructural development (Ogunode, & Ukozor, 2023). Artificial intelligence enhances university management by supporting evidence-based decisions, strengthening institutional governance, and enabling universities to respond more effectively to complex administrative and academic challenges in a rapidly evolving educational environment. AI is used to automate routine processes, support decision-making, enhance service delivery, and improve overall institutional performance. As higher education institutions grow in size and complexity, AI has become an important tool for effective governance, administration, and management.

3.0 Result and Discussion on Artificial Intelligence and the Enhancement of the Selection Process of Principal Officers in Nigerian Universities

This section discuss how AI can be systematically applied to enhance the selection process of principal officers in Nigerian universities.

Automated Job Advertisement and Candidate Sourcing

AI-powered systems can assist universities in advertising vacant academic and non-academic positions across multiple digital platforms. These systems can identify and attract qualified candidates by analyzing online profiles, academic databases, and professional networks. This helps institutions reach a wider pool of applicants, both locally and internationally.



Screening and Shortlisting of Applications

Recruitment in universities often involves handling hundreds or thousands of applications. AI tools can automatically screen applications by matching candidates' qualifications, experience, research output, and skills with job requirements. This significantly reduces the workload of human resource departments and ensures faster and more objective shortlisting processes.

AI systems, when properly designed, can help reduce human bias related to gender, ethnicity, religion, or personal connections. By focusing on merit-based criteria such as qualifications, publications, teaching experience, and professional competencies, AI supports fairness and transparency in staff recruitment.

Interview Scheduling and Assessment

AI can be used to schedule interviews, conduct preliminary virtual interviews, and analyze candidates' responses using structured criteria. Some AI tools assess communication skills, subject knowledge, and problem-solving abilities, thereby supporting informed decision-making by recruitment panels.

Verification of Credentials

AI systems can assist in verifying academic qualifications, professional certifications, and employment history by cross-checking data from recognized databases. This reduces cases of falsified credentials and enhances the integrity of the recruitment process.

AI-Driven Criteria Standardization and Transparency

One major challenge in the selection of principal officers is inconsistency in the application of selection criteria. AI can enhance the process by digitizing and standardizing criteria such as academic qualifications, administrative experience, research output, leadership competence, and integrity records. Once these criteria are encoded into an AI system, all applicants are evaluated using the same benchmarks, thereby reducing arbitrariness and favoritism. The transparency of the process is further enhanced as the system generates clear scoring rubrics and documented evaluation outcomes that can be reviewed and audited by relevant stakeholders.

Automated Screening and Shortlisting of Candidates

AI systems can be used to automate the initial screening and shortlisting of candidates. Through natural language processing and data analytics, AI tools can analyze applicants' curriculum vitae, statements of vision, and administrative records to assess suitability for specific roles. This approach minimizes human error, reduces the influence of external pressure, and ensures that only



candidates who meet established requirements progress to subsequent stages of the selection process. Automated shortlisting also saves time and promotes efficiency in managing large volumes of applications.

Reduction of Bias and Enhancement of Meritocracy

Human-led selection processes are often susceptible to conscious and unconscious biases related to ethnicity, gender, institutional affiliation, or personal relationships. AI, when properly designed and ethically implemented, can help mitigate such biases by focusing strictly on objective data and performance indicators. By anonymizing candidate information during early evaluation stages, AI systems can promote merit-based assessments and strengthen fairness in the selection process. This contributes to improved institutional trust and reduces post-selection conflicts. AI systems, when properly designed, can help reduce human bias related to gender, ethnicity, religion, or personal connections. By focusing on merit-based criteria such as qualifications, publications, teaching experience, and professional competencies, AI supports fairness and transparency in staff recruitment.

Data-Driven Decision Support for Selection Committees

AI can provide advanced decision-support tools for governing councils and selection committees. By aggregating and analyzing historical data on leadership performance, institutional outcomes, and governance trends, AI systems can generate predictive insights on candidates' potential effectiveness in office. These insights support informed deliberations and complement human judgment rather than replacing it. As a result, final decisions are better grounded in evidence and strategic institutional needs.

Accountability, Audit Trails, and Governance Compliance

Another significant contribution of AI to the selection process is the creation of digital audit trails. AI systems automatically record evaluation steps, scoring decisions, and ranking processes, making it easier to verify compliance with university regulations and national guidelines. This level of accountability discourages manipulation and enhances public confidence in the integrity of the selection process. In the event of disputes or legal challenges, documented AI-generated records provide credible evidence of procedural fairness.

Ethical Considerations and Human Oversight

While AI offers numerous benefits, its application in leadership selection must be guided by ethical principles and strong human oversight. Selection committees retain final decision-making authority, ensuring that contextual factors and institutional values are considered. Clear policies



on data privacy, algorithm transparency, and stakeholder engagement are essential to prevent misuse and ensure acceptance among university communities.

4.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

The selection of principal officers in Nigerian universities such as Vice-Chancellors, Deputy Vice-Chancellors, Registrars, and Bursars plays a critical role in determining institutional stability, academic excellence, and effective governance. However, the process has often been characterized by controversies, allegations of bias, political interference, and lack of transparency, which frequently result in disputes and crises within the university system. In response to these challenges, artificial intelligence (AI) has emerged as a transformative tool capable of improving decision-making processes through objectivity, efficiency, and accountability.

Artificial intelligence provides a practical and innovative pathway for enhancing the selection process of principal officers in Nigerian universities. By standardizing criteria, reducing bias, improving transparency, supporting evidence-based decisions, and strengthening accountability mechanisms, AI can significantly mitigate the crises associated with leadership selection. When integrated responsibly with existing governance structures and human judgment, AI has the potential to promote meritocracy, institutional stability, and sustainable university governance in Nigeria. Based on the findings, the chapter recommends the followings:

1) Development of a National AI-Guided Selection Framework

The Federal Ministry of Education, in collaboration with the National Universities Commission (NUC), should develop a standardized AI-guided framework for the selection of principal officers in Nigerian universities. This framework should clearly define selection criteria, evaluation indicators, and ethical guidelines to ensure uniformity, transparency, and compliance across federal, state, and private universities.

2) Integration of AI as a Decision-Support Tool, Not a Replacement

Artificial intelligence should be integrated strictly as a decision-support system rather than a substitute for governing councils and selection committees. Final appointment decisions should remain the responsibility of statutory bodies, with AI-generated assessments serving as objective inputs to guide deliberations and reduce subjectivity.

3) Capacity Building and Training for University Stakeholders

Continuous training should be provided for governing council members, selection committee officials, and relevant administrative staff on the use of AI-based selection systems. Building



digital and AI literacy will enhance effective utilization, promote trust in the system, and reduce resistance to technological adoption.

4) Clear Ethical, Legal, and Data Protection Guidelines

Universities should establish robust ethical and legal frameworks to guide the use of AI in leadership selection. These should address data privacy, algorithm transparency, fairness, and accountability in line with Nigeria's data protection regulations. Clear guidelines will prevent misuse and protect the rights of applicants.

5) Pilot Implementation and Gradual Scaling

The adoption of AI in the selection of principal officers should begin with pilot programs in selected universities. Lessons learned from these pilots can inform improvements before scaling up nationwide. A phased approach will allow institutions to adapt gradually and address technical or operational challenges.

6) Independent Monitoring and Periodic Evaluation

An independent monitoring mechanism should be instituted to periodically evaluate the effectiveness of AI-assisted selection processes. Regular audits will ensure adherence to established guidelines, assess impact on transparency and meritocracy, and identify areas requiring improvement.

7) Stakeholder Engagement and Sensitization

University staff unions, academic communities, and the general public should be sensitized on the purpose and benefits of AI-assisted selection processes. Inclusive stakeholder engagement will foster acceptance, reduce suspicion, and enhance institutional legitimacy.

8) Continuous Improvement of AI Systems

AI systems used in the selection process should be regularly updated to reflect evolving institutional needs, policy reforms, and best practices in university governance. Continuous improvement will ensure relevance, accuracy, and sustainability of AI-driven selection mechanisms.



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Concluding Synthesis

This edited volume, *Sustainable Education in Africa*, presents a robust and multidimensional exploration of the evolving dynamics shaping educational systems across Nigeria and the broader African context. The contributions collectively interrogate critical issues such as digital transformation, artificial intelligence in educational planning, gender inclusivity, economic constraints, institutional effectiveness, and the intersection of education with national development priorities.

A synthesis of the chapters reveals that sustainable education in Africa is inherently complex and requires an integrated, systems-oriented approach. While technological advancements offer transformative potential for improving educational access, quality, and administration, their successful implementation is dependent on enabling environments characterized by adequate infrastructure, policy coherence, and human capacity development.

Furthermore, the persistence of structural barriers—including underfunding, inequality, insecurity, and governance challenges—continues to impede progress. The contributors consistently emphasize that achieving sustainability in education necessitates deliberate, inclusive, and context-sensitive policy interventions that address both systemic inefficiencies and emerging global trends.

Importantly, this volume reinforces the position of education as a strategic instrument for sustainable development, aligning with global development priorities while responding to local realities. The insights generated herein contribute meaningfully to scholarly discourse and provide actionable knowledge for stakeholders across the education sector.

Implications for Practice

Drawing from the collective contributions of this volume, several practical implications emerge for policymakers, educational leaders, and practitioners:

- **Policy and Governance:** Governments should prioritize coherent and forward-looking educational policies that integrate technology, inclusivity, and sustainability into national development agendas.
- **Investment in Infrastructure:** There is a critical need for sustained investment in digital infrastructure, learning facilities, and instructional resources to support modern educational delivery systems.
- **Capacity Building:** Continuous professional development for educators and administrators is essential, particularly in the areas of digital literacy, data-driven decision-making, and innovative pedagogy.
- **Equity and Inclusion:** Educational interventions must intentionally address gender disparities, socio-economic inequalities, and access challenges affecting marginalized populations.
- **Research and Innovation:** Institutions should foster a culture of research and innovation to generate context-relevant solutions and inform evidence-based practices.
- **Collaboration:** Stronger partnerships among governments, private sector actors, development agencies, and academic institutions are necessary to drive sustainable educational transformation.

Editors' Note

The editors of this volume express profound appreciation to all contributing authors for their scholarly rigor, intellectual depth, and commitment to advancing knowledge in the field of education. The diversity of perspectives represented in this work reflects the complexity of educational challenges and opportunities within Africa.

We also acknowledge the invaluable contributions of peer reviewers, editorial board members, and institutional supporters whose efforts ensured the academic quality and integrity of this publication.

This volume is conceived not only as a scholarly resource but also as a catalyst for dialogue, policy reform, and practical innovation. It is our expectation that the ideas presented herein will inspire further research and contribute to the ongoing transformation of education systems across the continent.