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ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND TEACHER EDUCATION IN NIGERIA IN THE 21ST CENTURY: A REVIEW OF TRANSFORMATIONS, CHALLENGES, AND FUTURE PATHWAYS

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Abstract

The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into teacher education has emerged as a critical frontier in Nigeria's quest to modernise its educational system and achieve sustainable development goals. This review article synthesises current literature, policy documents, and implementation reports to examine the state of AI integration in Nigerian teacher education programmes in the 21st century. The review identifies significant opportunities, including enhanced lesson planning, personalised professional development, and improved pedagogical efficiency, alongside persistent challenges such as inadequate digital infrastructure, limited AI literacy among teacher educators, funding constraints, and the absence of comprehensive policy frameworks. Drawing on recent national initiatives including the Naija Teacher AI project targeting 1.5 million teachers, the EDAIL programme that has trained over 6,000 educators and the development of Nigeria's Draft National Higher Education AI Framework the article argues that Nigeria is at a pivotal moment where strategic, context-sensitive implementation of AI could transform teacher preparation. The review concludes with recommendations for policy development, infrastructure investment, capacity building, and ethical governance to ensure that AI serves as an enabler of educational equity and quality rather than a driver of further marginalisation.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Teacher Education, Nigeria, AI Literacy, Digital Transformation, Teacher Professional Development

Introduction

The 21st century has ushered in unprecedented technological transformations, with Artificial Intelligence (AI) emerging as a powerful force reshaping educational landscapes globally. In Nigeria, where the education system serves over 30 million learners through approximately 1.5 million teachers, the imperative to integrate AI into teacher education has never been more urgent (Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria & GMind AI, 2025). The Federal Ministry of Education's 2025 curriculum reform, which introduced AI, robotics, and digital literacy as core

components, has dramatically increased the urgency of building teacher capacity for technology-enhanced learning (Akinwande, 2025).

Teacher education programmes in Nigeria delivered through Colleges of Education (awarding the Nigeria Certificate in Education, NCE), Faculties of Education in universities, and Professional Diploma in Education (PDE) programmes serve as the primary pathways for preparing the nation's teaching workforce (Egwuatu et al., 2026). However, these programmes have historically faced challenges including inadequate infrastructure, limited access to modern pedagogical tools, and curricula that struggle to keep pace with technological change (Agwom et al., 2026). The advent of generative AI and other AI-powered educational technologies presents both an opportunity to address these long-standing challenges and a set of new complexities requiring careful navigation.

This review article examines the intersection of AI and teacher education in Nigeria, addressing three key questions: (1) What opportunities does AI present for enhancing teacher preparation in the Nigerian context? (2) What challenges constrain effective AI integration into teacher education programmes? (3) What policy and practical pathways can guide responsible, equitable AI adoption? By synthesising peer-reviewed literature, policy documents, and reports of recent national initiatives, this review provides a comprehensive assessment of where Nigeria stands and where it needs to go in leveraging AI for teacher development.

The Nigerian Teacher Education Landscape: Context and Imperatives

To understand the implications of AI for teacher education in Nigeria, it is essential to appreciate the structural and systemic context within which teacher preparation operates. Nigeria's teacher education system is characterised by significant scale, considerable diversity, and persistent quality challenges.

The nation's teaching workforce comprises approximately 1.5 million licensed teachers serving over 30 million students across basic and secondary education (Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria & GMind AI, 2025). Teacher preparation occurs through multiple pathways: the Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) offered by Colleges of Education, degree programmes in university Faculties of Education, and the Professional Diploma in Education (PDE) for graduates entering the profession through alternative routes (Egwuatu et al., 2026). The Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN) serves as the regulatory body responsible for licensing, certification, and professional standards (Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria & GMind AI, 2025).

Despite the critical importance of teachers to educational quality, Nigeria's teacher education programmes have faced substantial challenges. These include inadequate funding, poor digital infrastructure, limited access to contemporary teaching resources, and curricula that often lag behind global best practices (Agwom et al., 2026). Many teacher educators themselves lack adequate digital literacy, creating a cascade effect where underprepared trainers produce underprepared teachers (Samuel et al., 2025). Furthermore, the rapid pace of technological change has outpaced the capacity of many institutions to update their programmes, leaving graduating teachers ill-equipped for modern classrooms (Akinwande, 2025).

Against this backdrop, AI has emerged not merely as another technological innovation to be added to the curriculum but as a potentially transformative force that could fundamentally reshape how teachers are trained, supported, and evaluated (Samuel et al., 2025). The timing is particularly significant given the recent curriculum reform mandating the teaching of AI and digital literacy in K-12 schools, creating an immediate need for teachers who are not only literate in AI but capable of teaching it effectively (Akinwande, 2025).

Opportunities: How AI Can Transform Teacher Education in Nigeria

Enhancing Pedagogical Efficiency and Reducing Workload

One of the most immediately impactful applications of AI in teacher education is the automation of routine tasks that consume disproportionate amounts of teachers' time. Research from the Naija Teacher AI initiative indicates that AI-powered tools can reduce teachers' instructional planning and grading time by 30–50%, significantly reducing burnout and freeing time for creative and meaningful classroom engagement (Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria & GMind AI, 2025). For teacher educators preparing pre-service teachers, AI tools can similarly streamline assessment, feedback, and resource development processes (Egwuatu et al., 2026).

The GMind AI platform deployed through the Naija Teacher AI initiative offers over 30 AI-powered teaching tools for lesson planning, differentiated assessment, and real-time feedback, designed specifically for offline-first, mobile-ready environments that accommodate Nigeria's variable connectivity (Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria & GMind AI, 2025). These tools enable teacher educators to model effective AI integration practices, demonstrating to pre-service teachers how AI can support rather than replace professional pedagogical judgment (Samuel et al., 2025).

Personalising Professional Development at Scale

Traditional professional development models characterised by one-size-fits-all workshops and limited follow-up have proven inadequate for building AI literacy among Nigeria's large and geographically dispersed teaching workforce (Olurinola et al., 2026). AI-powered systems offer the potential for personalised, adaptive professional development that responds to individual teachers' knowledge levels, learning preferences, and classroom contexts (Samuel et al., 2025).

The EDAIL (Educators' Artificial Intelligence Literacy) Project, funded by the Google Academic Research Award and implemented across all six geopolitical zones of Nigeria, represents a significant step in this direction. The programme has trained over 6,000 teachers nationwide, with the EduAI-NG dataset capturing pre- and post-training responses to assess AI readiness and measure training impact (Olurinola et al., 2026). The Teacher AI Deployment Readiness Index (TADRI-lite) developed through this project provides a validated instrument for quantifying educator preparedness across four competency domains: AI foundational knowledge, pedagogical integration of AI, ethical and responsible AI awareness, and deployment readiness (Olurinola et al., 2026).

Supporting Teacher Educators' Own Professional Growth

Teacher educators themselves require substantial upskilling to effectively integrate AI into their programmes. The IIOE (International Institute of Online Education) Nigeria National Centre at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, has demonstrated a model for addressing this need through localised micro-certification courses. The Centre became the first IIOE National Centre to complete the full cycle of localised micro-course implementation, domesticating courses on designing and producing micro-courses, designing and producing presentations, and conducting collaborative instructional research with online and offline integration (Mu'azu et al., 2025).

These micro-certifications provide flexible, competency-based pathways for teacher educators to develop AI literacy and digital pedagogy skills, earning credentials that can be recognised across institutional and national boundaries (Mu'azu et al., 2025). The expansion of the IIOE Nigeria Network from eight to sixteen partner institutions demonstrates the scalability of this approach (Mu'azu et al., 2025).

Strengthening Research and Evidence-Based Practice

AI tools are increasingly capable of supporting educational research activities, including literature synthesis, data analysis, and academic writing assistance. For Nigerian teacher education programmes many of which struggle with limited access to research resources and academic journals AI could democratise access to research capabilities, enabling more faculty members to engage in rigorous educational research (Egwuatu et al., 2026).

The EduAI-NG dataset exemplifies how AI readiness research can produce open, FAIR-aligned (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Reusable) data resources that support benchmarking, predictive modelling, and policy-driven capacity development (Olurinola et al., 2026). Such datasets enable evidence-based decision-making about AI integration strategies and facilitate Nigeria's contribution to the global AI in Education (AIED) research community.

Supporting Inclusive Education

AI-powered tools offer particular promise for supporting inclusive education in Nigeria's diverse and resource-constrained contexts. Adaptive learning systems can provide personalised support for students with varying learning needs, while AI-powered text-to-speech and speech-to-text tools can assist learners with disabilities (Akinwande, 2025). For teacher education programmes, integrating these tools ensures that future teachers are equipped to leverage AI for inclusive practices (Samuel et al., 2025).

Challenges: Barriers to AI Integration in Nigerian Teacher Education

Digital Infrastructure Deficits

The most frequently cited barrier to AI integration in Nigerian teacher education is inadequate digital infrastructure. Studies consistently identify poor electricity supply, limited internet connectivity (particularly in rural areas), and insufficient computing devices as fundamental constraints (Agwom et al., 2026; Egwuatu et al., 2026). A study of science educators in North

Central Nigeria found that 78% of administrators identified infrastructure limitations as a critical barrier to AI implementation (Agwom et al., 2026).

While initiatives like Naija Teacher AI have addressed this through offline-first, mobile-ready platform design that enables functionality without continuous internet access (Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria & GMind AI, 2025), such solutions cannot fully compensate for the absence of basic infrastructure. Teacher education institutions require reliable power, adequate bandwidth, and sufficient devices to enable meaningful AI integration (Egwuatu et al., 2026).

Limited AI Literacy Among Teacher Educators

Even where infrastructure exists, human capacity constraints present formidable challenges. Research indicates limited AI literacy among teacher educators themselves, creating a situation where those responsible for modelling AI integration lack the necessary knowledge and skills (Samuel et al., 2025). A survey of teacher educators in North Central Nigeria found that AI literacy was low across most competency domains, with many respondents expressing discomfort with even basic AI concepts (Agwom et al., 2026).

This challenge is compounded by resistance to technological change among some educators, who may view AI with suspicion or fear regarding job displacement (Samuel et al., 2025). Addressing this requires not only technical training but also attention to attitudes, beliefs, and professional identities what some have termed developing the right "AI-titude" that positions AI as a support tool rather than a replacement for teacher expertise (Samuel et al., 2025).

Inadequate Policy and Governance Frameworks

The rapid adoption of AI in Nigeria's higher education ecosystem has outpaced the development of formal governance frameworks. As recently as 2023, there was no national or institutional regulatory framework governing AI use in teaching, learning, research, and administration (Mu'azu et al., 2025). This absence creates uncertainty about acceptable practices, data privacy requirements, academic integrity standards, and ethical guidelines.

In response, the IIOE Nigeria National Centre convened institutional and national dialogues in 2023 and 2024, bringing together federal ministries, regulatory agencies, academic leaders, industry partners, and international organisations. These dialogues produced Nigeria's first structured roadmap for AI integration in higher education: The Draft National Higher Education AI Framework, which was submitted to the Federal Ministry of Education and the National Universities Commission (NUC) (Mu'azu et al., 2025). The NUC subsequently developed two policy documents: "Towards Responsible AI Integration in the Nigerian University System" and a "Roadmap for the Integration of Artificial Intelligence into the Nigerian University System" (Mu'azu et al., 2025). However, these frameworks remain nascent, and their implementation across all teacher education institutions is far from assured.

Funding Constraints

Adequate financial resources are essential for infrastructure development, device procurement, software licensing, professional development, and ongoing technical support. Yet Nigerian teacher

education institutions face chronic underfunding, with many Colleges of Education and university Faculties of Education operating on budgets that barely cover basic operational costs (Egwuatu et al., 2026). A study of science education found that 71% of administrators identified budget constraints as a major barrier to AI implementation (Agwom et al., 2026).

The Naija Teacher AI initiative has developed a low-cost sponsorship model costing approximately USD 30 per teacher per year, with over USD 500,000 in seed funding from donor partners including the Mastercard Foundation (Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria & GMind AI, 2025). While such models demonstrate that large-scale AI deployment can be cost-effective, sustaining and scaling these initiatives requires continued investment from government, development partners, and the private sector (Akinwande, 2025).

Concerns About Academic Integrity and Ethical Use

The rise of generative AI tools has raised significant concerns about academic integrity, plagiarism, and the potential erosion of traditional cognitive skills. Teacher education programmes must grapple with how to teach students to use AI tools ethically and responsibly, distinguishing between appropriate assistance and unacceptable delegation of intellectual work (Akinwande, 2025; Egwuatu et al., 2026).

These concerns extend to assessment practices, as traditional assignments may no longer reliably measure student learning when AI can produce passing work with minimal human input. Teacher educators must develop new assessment approaches that evaluate process as well as product, critical thinking as well as content knowledge, and ethical judgment as well as technical proficiency (Samuel et al., 2025).

Risk of Exacerbating Educational Inequalities

Perhaps the most significant concern is that AI integration, if poorly managed, could exacerbate existing educational inequalities. Institutions with greater resources will adopt AI faster and more effectively, widening the gap between well-resourced and under-resourced teacher education programmes (Egwuatu et al., 2026). Similarly, teachers in urban areas with reliable connectivity will have access to AI tools and training that their rural counterparts lack, potentially increasing disparities in teacher quality and student outcomes (Agwom et al., 2026).

This risk has been recognised by policymakers, with the Draft National Higher Education AI Framework explicitly emphasising the need to promote equity, inclusiveness, and access helping to bridge the digital divide and prevent new forms of marginalisation (Mu'azu et al., 2025). However, translating this principle into practice requires deliberate policy design and resource allocation.

Current Initiatives and Emerging Models

Despite the challenges, Nigeria has witnessed the emergence of several significant initiatives demonstrating what is possible when political will, technical expertise, and strategic partnerships align.

Naija Teacher AI: A National Scaling Initiative

The most ambitious initiative to date is Naija Teacher AI, a national programme jointly implemented by the Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN) and GMind AI. Launched in August 2025 with a two-year implementation period, the initiative aims to equip 1.5 million licensed Nigerian teachers with AI-powered tools and digital training (Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria & GMind AI, 2025).

The programme's design reflects careful attention to Nigeria's context: an offline-first, mobile-ready AI platform that ensures rural reach; professional development delivered through the GMind AI Academy, including micro-learning, certifications, and workshops; and real-time monitoring through dashboards and impact reporting. The pilot phase (Q4 2025) trained 50,000 teachers and 2,500 master trainers, with plans to reach 500,000 teachers by Q2 2026 and full adoption of 1.5 million teachers by Q3 2026 (Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria & GMind AI, 2025).

Early results are promising: thirteen active communities of practice engage more than 30,000 teachers daily, and participating teachers report 30–50% reduction in lesson planning and grading time, reduced burnout, and improved confidence in digital pedagogy (Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria & GMind AI, 2025).

EDAIL Project: Building AI Literacy Through Research

The Educators' Artificial Intelligence Literacy (EDAIL) Project, funded by Google and implemented at Olabisi Onabanjo University, represents a research-driven approach to building AI literacy among Nigerian educators. The project has trained over 6,000 teachers across all six geopolitical zones, producing the EduAI-NG dataset that provides a longitudinal benchmark of educator AI readiness (Olurinola et al., 2026; Olabisi Onabanjo University, 2025).

The project's emphasis on rigorous measurement and evaluation including pre- and post-training assessments and a matched cohort of 770 educators enabling longitudinal analysis sets a standard for evidence-based AI capacity building. The development of the Teacher AI Deployment Readiness Index (TADRI-lite) provides a validated instrument that can be used for benchmarking and policy development across different contexts (Olurinola et al., 2026).

IIOE Nigeria National Centre: Policy and Curriculum Development

The IIOE Nigeria National Centre at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, has focused on the policy and curriculum dimensions of AI integration. Through a structured dialogue process beginning with an institutional dialogue in November 2023 followed by a national dialogue in July 2024 the Centre convened diverse stakeholders to build consensus on responsible AI use in higher education (Mu'azu et al., 2025).

The resulting Draft National Higher Education AI Framework provides a foundation for policy development at both national and institutional levels. The Centre's work on localised micro-certification courses demonstrates how international resources can be adapted to Nigerian contexts, creating sustainable pathways for continuous professional development (Mu'azu et al., 2025).

State-Level Initiatives

Beyond national programmes, several state governments have launched AI training initiatives for teachers. Kwara State, for example, conducted a one-day training programme on "Empowering the 21st Century Educator" for selected public senior secondary school teachers, reflecting growing recognition at the subnational level of the need for teacher AI literacy (Kwara State Government, 2025). While such initiatives are valuable, their limited scale and duration raise questions about sustainability and replicability.

Conceptual Frameworks for AI Integration in Teacher Education

Effective AI integration in teacher education requires more than technological deployment; it demands a coherent conceptual framework that addresses technological, pedagogical, and sociological dimensions.

A Dual-Lens Framework

Samuel, Offor, and Karimu (2025) propose a dual-lens framework integrating technological and sociological perspectives. The technological perspective focuses on tools, platforms, and infrastructure, addressing questions of what technologies are available, how they function, and what capabilities they enable. The sociological perspective emphasises teacher attitudes, equity of access, and systemic readiness, addressing questions of who benefits, who is excluded, and how social factors shape technology adoption (Samuel et al., 2025).

This dual-lens approach is particularly valuable in the Nigerian context, where technological solutions must be adapted to social realities of limited infrastructure, diverse cultural contexts, and significant economic disparities. The framework identifies four interrelated constructs: technological and sociological readiness, teacher professional development, AI-enhanced teacher competence, and student and system outcomes (Samuel et al., 2025).

Competency Domains for Teacher AI Literacy

Drawing on the EDAIL project's work, teacher AI literacy can be conceptualised as encompassing four competency domains (Olurinola et al., 2026):

1. AI Foundational Knowledge: Understanding basic AI concepts, capabilities, and limitations

2. Pedagogical Integration of AI: Ability to select, adapt, and use AI tools for specific teaching and learning purposes

3. Ethical and Responsible AI Awareness: Understanding of data privacy, bias, academic integrity, and appropriate use boundaries

4. Deployment Readiness: Practical ability to implement AI tools in actual classroom contexts, including troubleshooting and adaptation

These competency domains provide a framework for curriculum development in teacher education programmes, ensuring that pre-service and in-service teachers develop comprehensive AI literacy rather than narrow technical skills (Samuel et al., 2025; Olurinola et al., 2026).

Recommendations

1. While the Draft National Higher Education AI Framework represents significant progress, it must be formally adopted, disseminated, and implemented across all teacher education institutions (Mu'azu et al., 2025). Policies should address: acceptable use guidelines for AI tools, data privacy and security requirements, academic integrity standards in the AI era, and equity provisions to ensure that AI integration does not exacerbate existing disparities (Samuel et al., 2025; Egwuatu et al., 2026).

2. Government at federal and state levels must prioritise investment in the digital infrastructure essential for AI integration: reliable electricity supply, affordable internet connectivity (particularly in rural areas), and adequate computing devices for teacher education institutions (Agwom et al., 2026; Egwuatu et al., 2026). Public-private partnerships, such as those demonstrated by Naija Teacher AI's collaboration with telecommunications partners, offer promising models for extending infrastructure to underserved areas (Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria & GMind AI, 2025).

3. Before pre-service teachers can develop AI literacy, their trainers must acquire it themselves. Targeted professional development programmes for teacher educators should be prioritised, focusing not only on technical skills but also on pedagogical applications and ethical considerations (Samuel et al., 2025). Micro-certification pathways, like those developed by the IIOE Nigeria National Centre, offer flexible, recognised credentials that can motivate participation (Mu'azu et al., 2025).

4. AI should not be treated as an isolated topic but integrated across teacher education curricula. Every teacher education graduate should understand AI's capabilities and limitations, be able to use AI tools appropriately for planning, instruction, and assessment, and possess strategies for teaching students about responsible AI use (Akinwande, 2025; Samuel et al., 2025). This requires revision of curriculum standards across NCE, degree, and PDE programmes (Egwuatu et al., 2026).

5. Given concerns about bias, privacy, and academic integrity, teacher education institutions must establish clear ethical guidelines for AI use. These should address: when AI use is appropriate and when it is not, how to protect student data privacy, how to identify and mitigate algorithmic bias, and how to maintain human oversight of AI-generated outputs (Akinwande, 2025; Olurinola et al., 2026).

6. Nigeria needs more robust evidence about what works in AI integration for teacher education, under what conditions, and for whom. Continued support for initiatives like the EDAIL project, which generate open datasets and validated instruments, will enable evidence-based policymaking (Olurinola et al., 2026). Research priorities should include: comparative effectiveness of different training approaches, equity implications of AI adoption, and long-term impacts on teacher practice and student outcomes (Samuel et al., 2025).

7. The success of Naija Teacher AI's communities of practice engaging over 30,000 teachers daily demonstrates the power of peer learning for AI adoption (Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria & GMind AI, 2025). Teacher education institutions should establish similar communities where pre-service and in-service teachers can share experiences, solve problems collaboratively, and learn from each other's successes and failures.

Conclusion

Nigeria stands at a pivotal moment in the integration of Artificial Intelligence into teacher education. The confluence of curriculum reform mandating AI literacy, national initiatives scaling AI training to millions of teachers, and emerging policy frameworks creates unprecedented opportunities for transformative change (Akinwande, 2025; Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria & GMind AI, 2025; Mu'azu et al., 2025). Yet the challenges are equally significant: infrastructure deficits, limited human capacity, funding constraints, and the risk of exacerbating inequalities demand careful, context-sensitive responses (Agwom et al., 2026; Egwuatu et al., 2026; Samuel et al., 2025). The evidence reviewed in this article suggests that AI is neither a panacea for Nigeria's teacher education challenges nor a threat to be resisted, but rather a powerful tool whose impact will depend entirely on how it is deployed (Samuel et al., 2025). Where thoughtful attention is paid to teacher needs, contextual constraints, and ethical considerations, AI can enhance pedagogical efficiency, personalise professional development, and support inclusive education. Where deployment is rushed, poorly planned, or indifferent to equity, AI risks widening existing gaps and undermining the very professional judgment that lies at the heart of effective teaching (Egwuatu et al., 2026). The way forward requires balanced, strategic action across multiple fronts: policy development that provides clear guidance without stifling innovation; infrastructure investment that reaches the most marginalised institutions; capacity building that prioritises teacher educators themselves; and ongoing research that generates evidence to guide decision-making (Mu'azu et al., 2025; Olurinola et al., 2026; Akinwande, 2025). Most fundamentally, success requires recognising that AI is a tool in service of human flourishing, not

an end in itself. The goal of AI integration in teacher education is not to produce technologically proficient teachers but to produce excellent teachers who can leverage AI appropriately to support the learning and development of all Nigerian students.

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