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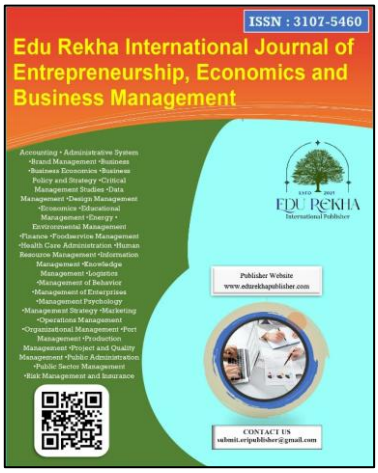
ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND RESEARCH IN BUSINESS AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION IN SOUTH-EAST UNIVERSITIES IN NIGERIA



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Abstract

The rapid advancement of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has transformed higher education, research, and entrepreneurial practices across the globe. However, its adoption in Nigerian universities, particularly in the South-East, remains limited. This study investigates the effect of AI on research in business and entrepreneurship education in federal universities within the South-East region of Nigeria. Specifically, the study examines how AI tools for data analysis and market research influence research quality and assesses the effect of AI applications on students' entrepreneurial learning and development. A cross-sectional survey research design was employed, and data were collected from 207 undergraduate students of business and entrepreneurship education using a structured questionnaire validated with a reliability coefficient of 0.81. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled Artificial Intelligence in Business and Entrepreneurship Education Index (AIBEEI). Data were analyzed using the Spearman Rank Order Correlation Coefficient at a 0.05 level of significance. Findings reveal that AI tools for data analysis and market research significantly improve the quality of research in business and entrepreneurship education. Similarly, AI applications such as business simulation platforms and predictive analytics significantly enhance students' entrepreneurial learning, creativity, and innovation. The study concludes that integrating AI into business and entrepreneurship education strengthens research productivity, fosters entrepreneurial competence, and equips graduates with relevant skills for a technology-driven economy. It is recommended that universities in South-East Nigeria incorporate AI-driven platforms into their curricula and provide training workshops for both students and lecturers to maximize the benefits of AI for research and entrepreneurial development.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Business Education, Entrepreneurship Education, Research, Innovation, Digital Economy.

Introduction

The rapid growth of information technology, artificial intelligence (AI), robotics, and digital innovations has transformed higher education and reshaped the global economy. In this AI era, university graduates are expected to possess not only strong theoretical foundations but also the ability to integrate advanced digital tools into problem-solving, innovation, and entrepreneurship (Okeke, 2021; Obidike, 2022). Consequently, research and learning in business and entrepreneurship education must align with these technological realities to produce graduates who are competitive, employable, and self-reliant in a digital economy.

AI applications ranging from data analytics, machine learning, natural language processing, and intelligent tutoring systems have become essential in redefining how knowledge is created, shared, and applied in business and entrepreneurial ventures (Adebayo & Aluko, 2020). These technologies enable students and researchers to analyze large volumes of data, identify market trends, predict consumer behaviour, automate processes, and optimize decision-making. Such capacities are crucial for entrepreneurial success in today's highly competitive and technologically driven business environment.

In Nigerian universities, particularly in the South-East, the integration of AI into research and pedagogy in business and entrepreneurship education is still at a developing stage. Many students are trained through conventional methods that emphasize theory and classroom lectures but provide limited exposure to technological tools that can enhance research productivity, innovation, and entrepreneurial outcomes (Chukwu, 2019; Eze, 2021). As a result, many graduates face difficulties in applying modern research methodologies, leveraging AI for business innovation, or launching technology-driven ventures.

Employers and stakeholders increasingly demand graduates who can combine entrepreneurial orientation with technological fluency, digital literacy, and problem-solving abilities. This underscores the need to embed AI tools and practices into business and entrepreneurship education to foster creativity, adaptability, and research competence (Nwankwo & Ugwu, 2022). However, despite growing awareness of the transformative role of AI, gaps remain in its adoption, especially in terms of availability of resources, staff expertise, and curriculum design in Nigerian universities.

Against this background, this study seeks to examine the role of artificial intelligence in research within business and entrepreneurship education in South-East Nigerian universities, with a view to determining its effects on research outcomes and entrepreneurial development.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the rising importance of AI in global business and research, universities in South-East Nigeria have been slow to fully integrate AI into business and entrepreneurship education. Many students still rely on traditional academic training that lacks sufficient exposure to AI-based tools, such as predictive analytics, AI-powered simulations, or automated business platforms. This leaves them underprepared to compete in a technology-driven business environment or to establish innovative enterprises.

While AI has the potential to enhance research in entrepreneurship education by providing accurate data analysis, business modeling, and innovative insights, limited access to technology, inadequate infrastructure, and lack of expertise among academic staff hinder its effective use (Okoro & Nwachukwu, 2020). Consequently, students often struggle to apply modern digital research skills, engage in technology-driven entrepreneurship, or utilize AI in conducting impactful business research.

Available literature also reveals a gap in empirical studies that specifically examine how AI influences research in business and entrepreneurship education within South-East Nigerian universities. The extent to which AI adoption impacts research productivity, entrepreneurial creativity, and innovation remains underexplored. This knowledge gap necessitates the present study.

Objectives of the Study

The main aim of this study is to assess the effect of artificial intelligence on research in business and entrepreneurship education in South-East Nigerian universities. The specific objectives are to:

1. Examine how AI tools for data analysis and market research influence the quality of research in business and entrepreneurship education in South-East universities.
2. Assess the effect of AI applications on students' entrepreneurial learning and development.

Research Questions

1. How do AI tools for data analysis and market research influence the quality of research in business and entrepreneurship education in South-East universities?
2. How do AI applications affect students' entrepreneurial learning and development?

Hypotheses

In the course of this study, the following null hypotheses will be tested:

Ho1: AI tools for data analysis and market research do not significantly influence the quality of research in business and entrepreneurship education in South-East universities.

Ho2: AI applications do not significantly affect students' entrepreneurial learning and development in South-East universities.

Review of Literature

Conceptual Review

Concept of Artificial Intelligence

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is reshaping how education, research, and businesses function in today's digital economy. According to Popenici and Kerr (2018), AI refers to technological innovations that simulate human thinking processes and enhance learning, problem-solving, and decision-making. Kaplan and Haenlein (2019) define Artificial Intelligence as the ability of a system to correctly interpret external data, learn from it, and apply such knowledge flexibly to achieve defined goals and tasks. Similarly, Kietzmann, Paschen, and Treen (2018) describe AI as a set of algorithms and programs designed to replicate human intelligence in specific tasks such as speech recognition, data analysis, and decision automation.

According to Agboola (2022), Artificial Intelligence is like a digital brain that can process vast amounts of data, recognize patterns, and make decisions autonomously. It is a game-changer in various industries, from healthcare and finance to transportation and education. In the same vein, Kurzweil (2019) defines Artificial Intelligence as the

art and science of creating intelligent machines, especially intelligent computer programs. Ogunode and Ukozo (2024) further explain that AI represents a collection of applications, systems, and programs designed into digital computers or computer-controlled robots to perform tasks with human-like intelligence. In the context of education and research, Luckin (2019) emphasizes that AI has moved beyond automation and now enables personalized learning, adaptive tutoring, and improved research outcomes. Zawacki-Richter, Marín, Bond, and Gouverneur (2019) further explain that AI applications in higher education include intelligent tutoring systems, learning analytics, and predictive algorithms that improve the quality of research and teaching. Al-Emran, Mezhuyev, and Kamaludin (2020) note that AI also supports entrepreneurship education by providing simulations, virtual learning environments, and automated business modeling that expose students to real-world scenarios.

Recent studies show the increasing adoption of AI in higher education and business research. Dwivedi, Hughes, and Rana (2021) argue that AI equips entrepreneurs and researchers with tools to analyze market trends, manage risks, and foster innovation. More recently, Otahanova (2025) observes that AI-powered platforms such as Duolingo and Khan Academy now use adaptive algorithms to personalize learning, while AI-based exam graders enhance the speed and accuracy of research assessments. From these perspectives, Artificial Intelligence can be seen as both a scientific discipline and a practical technological tool that enhances research, fosters innovation, and transforms teaching and entrepreneurial practices in universities and industries alike.

Concept of Research in Business and Entrepreneurship Education

Business education is an aspect of education that provides learners with knowledge, skills, and competencies in business-related areas such as accounting, management, marketing, finance, and office technology. According to Okoye and Ezenwafor (2020), business education equips students with both theoretical and practical abilities that prepare them for employment, entrepreneurship, and effective participation in economic activities. It is not only about preparing individuals for paid jobs but also about developing entrepreneurial capacities and managerial skills necessary for self-reliance.

Entrepreneurship education, on the other hand, is concerned with equipping learners with the mindset, creativity, and competencies required to identify opportunities, manage risks, and establish new ventures. Nabi, Liñán, Fayolle, Krueger, and Walmsley (2019) describe it as an educational process that develops entrepreneurial knowledge, skills, and attitudes, thereby enabling learners to create and sustain businesses. Fayolle (2018) further emphasizes that entrepreneurship education bridges theoretical knowledge with practical entrepreneurial action, making it a vital component in addressing unemployment and fostering innovation.

Research in business and entrepreneurship education therefore refers to systematic inquiry that seeks to improve knowledge, teaching practices, and practical application in these two fields. Fiet (2019) notes that entrepreneurship education research involves exploring effective ways of teaching entrepreneurial skills, while business education research generates empirical evidence for curriculum design, instructional improvement, and technological integration. Maritz, Perenyi, and de Waal (2021) highlight that contemporary research increasingly focuses on how digital technologies and artificial intelligence can transform both business and entrepreneurship education. Adu and Okeke (2022) observe that such research is now oriented toward enhancing creativity, innovation, and decision-making among students. Akinwale and Aremu (2024) maintain that research in these two fields is not only academic but also developmental, as it contributes to national progress by preparing graduates who are capable of managing businesses, creating jobs, and adapting to changing global economic conditions.

Theoretical Review

The study is anchored on the Technology Acceptance Model and the Human Capital Theory.

Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

This study is anchored on the Technology Acceptance Model, developed by Fred Davis in 1989. The theory assumes that individuals' adoption and use of technology are determined by two main factors: perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. It emphasizes that for technology to be fully embraced, users must believe that the innovation will enhance their performance and that it is simple enough to operate without excessive effort. Over the years, TAM has been widely applied in education and business to explain how learners, educators, and entrepreneurs adopt digital technologies.

The relevance of this theory to the present study lies in its focus on technology acceptance and utilization. Artificial Intelligence in business and entrepreneurship education can only be effective if students, teachers, and researchers perceive AI tools as beneficial and user-friendly. For instance, AI-driven applications for research, teaching, and entrepreneurial simulations will be readily adopted when they are seen as practical, supportive of innovation, and easy to integrate into learning and business processes. In the Nigerian context, where digital literacy and infrastructure vary widely, TAM highlights the importance of designing AI systems that are accessible and supportive of learning. TAM emphasizes perceived usefulness and ease of use as critical determinants of technology adoption. Thus, when business and entrepreneurship students and lecturers find AI applications useful in research productivity, business innovation, and entrepreneurial training, their likelihood of adoption increases. Furthermore, the model suggests that overcoming barriers to adoption, such as complexity or lack of awareness, is key to ensuring that AI positively influences research and practice in business and entrepreneurship education.

Human Capital Theory

This study is also anchored on the Human Capital Theory, propounded by Schultz in 1961 and further developed by Becker in 1964. The theory assumes that investment in education and training enhances individuals' skills, productivity, and capacity to contribute to economic development. It emphasizes that knowledge, competencies, and innovation gained through education are valuable assets that increase employability and entrepreneurial potential. Human Capital Theory further stresses that nations benefit when individuals are equipped with relevant skills for both the labor market and enterprise creation.

The relevance of this theory to the present study lies in its assertion that education, particularly when infused with technology such as Artificial Intelligence, is a form of investment in human potential. Business and entrepreneurship education enriched with AI research tools and applications equips students with practical skills for innovation, decision-making, and enterprise management. In the Nigerian context, where youth unemployment and skill gaps persist, AI-driven learning and research enhance students' preparedness to

either secure employment or establish sustainable businesses. Human Capital Theory stresses that skills development leads to increased productivity and innovation. Thus, as students engage with AI-powered business and entrepreneurial education, they acquire competencies that make them valuable contributors to economic growth. The theory also suggests that investment in AI-enhanced learning creates a multiplier effect, producing graduates who can adapt to technological changes, drive business transformation, and stimulate national development through entrepreneurial ventures.

Related Empirical Studies

Adu and Okeke (2022) carried out a study to investigate the role of Artificial Intelligence in promoting entrepreneurial skills among business education students in tertiary institutions in Lagos State, Nigeria. The study used a quasi-experimental design. The population of the study consisted of 368 business education students, out of which 180 students were purposively selected and divided into experimental and control groups. The experimental group was taught entrepreneurial skills with AI-assisted platforms such as business simulation software and chatbots, while the control group received conventional lecture methods. Data were collected using the Entrepreneurial Skills Assessment Scale (ESAS) with a reliability coefficient of 0.81. Independent t-test was used to analyze the data. The results showed that students exposed to AI-assisted entrepreneurial training significantly outperformed their counterparts in innovation, business planning, and digital marketing skills. The study concluded that integrating AI into entrepreneurship education enhances creativity, innovation, and business survival skills among students.

Igomu, Kwaghbo, Nayela and Elujekwute (2024) investigated the application of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Business Education and Entrepreneurship practice in Nigeria. Past research shows that AI technologies are increasingly transforming teaching, learning, and entrepreneurial processes but face adoption challenges in developing countries. This study sought to examine the roles, impacts, and challenges of AI in Business Education and Entrepreneurship. The study revealed that in Business Education, AI contributes to personalized learning, intelligent tutoring systems, enhanced accessibility, career guidance, and automated grading. Similarly, in Entrepreneurship practice, AI facilitates idea generation, market research, predictive analytics, automation, chatbots, and virtual assistants. The challenges identified include lack of AI literacy, insufficient curriculum development, limited access to AI resources, high costs, ethical concerns, and infrastructural constraints. Findings further indicated that despite these challenges, AI has significant potential to improve both education and entrepreneurship outcomes. The study recommended integrating AI literacy into curricula, developing strong regulatory awareness, strengthening data management systems, and promoting continuous learning to maximize the benefits of AI in Business Education and Entrepreneurship practice.

Martinez, Lopez, Gonzalez, Rivera, Chen, Suzuki, and Kim (2024) conducted a study on the impact of Artificial Intelligence-driven learning platforms in strengthening entrepreneurial education among undergraduate students in Spain and Japan. The study involved 428 business and management students across six universities, where AI-based tools such as business simulation games, virtual assistants, and predictive analytics software were integrated into entrepreneurship courses. Data were collected using pre- and post-intervention surveys, classroom observations, and focus group discussions. The results showed that AI applications significantly enhanced students' entrepreneurial intention, innovation capacity, and decision-making skills. Furthermore, cross-country comparisons revealed that Spanish students benefited more in creativity and idea generation, while Japanese students demonstrated stronger analytical and problem-solving competencies. The study concluded that the integration of AI in entrepreneurship education fosters globally competitive graduates with diverse entrepreneurial skill sets adaptable to different cultural and economic contexts. Based on the findings, the study recommended that universities and policymakers across different regions should adopt Artificial Intelligence-driven platforms and business simulation tools in entrepreneurship and business education curricula. Such integration would not only strengthen students' innovation and problem-solving abilities but also ensure they acquire globally relevant skills necessary for success in the rapidly evolving digital economy.

Akinwale and Aremu (2024) investigated the effectiveness of Artificial Intelligence in enhancing employability skills of management and business education students in Nigerian universities. The study adopted a mixed-methods design. The quantitative phase involved 320 final year students from three universities, while the qualitative phase consisted of 12 in-depth interviews with lecturers and industry experts. A researcher-developed questionnaire titled AI and Employability Skills Questionnaire (AIESQ) was used, with a reliability coefficient of 0.89. Quantitative data were analyzed using mean, standard deviation, and regression analysis, while qualitative data were thematically analyzed. The findings revealed that AI tools such as digital collaboration platforms, virtual internship systems, and predictive analytics improved students' employability skills in problem-solving, adaptability, and communication. The interviews further revealed that AI adoption faced challenges such as poor infrastructure and inadequate lecturer training. The study recommended that Nigerian universities should fully integrate AI technologies into the business education curriculum to enhance graduate employability and entrepreneurship outcomes.

Methods

The study adopted a cross-sectional survey research design. The population of the study comprised undergraduate students of Business and Entrepreneurship Education in federal universities in South-East Nigeria. These included University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN), Federal University of Technology, Owerri (FUTO), Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike (MOUAU), and Alex Ekwueme Federal University, Ndufu-Alike (AE-FUNAI). A purposive sampling technique was employed to select students who had received training in entrepreneurship and digital skills, as they were considered most relevant for the study. A total of 215 students were selected as respondents across the four universities. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled *Artificial Intelligence in Business and Entrepreneurship Education Index (AIBEEI)*. The instrument was designed on a modified four-point Likert scale with the following response options: Strongly Agreed (SA) = 4, Agreed (A) = 3, Disagreed (D) = 2, and Strongly Disagreed (SD) = 1.

The instrument was validated by two experts in management and entrepreneurship education, while its reliability coefficient was determined using Cronbach Alpha, which yielded 0.81, indicating high internal consistency. Out of the 215 questionnaire items administered, 207 (96%) were successfully retrieved and used for analysis. Data were analyzed using the Spearman Rank Order Correlation Coefficient (r) to test the hypotheses in a bivariate format, with the aid of SPSS Version 23, at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Ho1: AI tools for data analysis and market research do not significantly influence the quality of research in business and entrepreneurship education in South-East universities.

Table 1: Correlation

	AI Tools for Data Analysis and Market Research	Quality of Research
AI Tools for Data Analysis and Market Research	Correlation Coefficient	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.
	N	207
Quality of Research	Correlation Coefficient	.768**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	207

****Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).**

Source: *Researchers' Data, 2025.*

Table 1 above shows an **r value of 0.768** at a significance level of 0.000, which is less than the alpha level of 0.05. Since the significance value (0.000) is below 0.05, the null hypothesis (Ho1) which states that AI tools for data analysis and market research do not significantly influence the quality of research in business and entrepreneurship education in South-East universities, was rejected. Therefore, the alternate hypothesis is accepted. This implies that AI tools for data analysis and market research significantly influence the quality of research in business and entrepreneurship education in South-East universities.

Ho2: AI applications do not significantly affect students' entrepreneurial learning and development in South-East universities.

Table 2: Correlation

	AI Applications	Entrepreneurial Learning and Development
AI Applications	Correlation Coefficient	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.
	N	207
Entrepreneurial Learning and Development	Correlation Coefficient	.791**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	207

****Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).**

Source: *Researchers' Data, 2025.*

Table 2 above shows an **r value of 0.791** at a significance level of 0.000, which is lower than the alpha level of 0.05. Since the significance value (0.000) is below 0.05, the null hypothesis (Ho2) which states that AI applications do not significantly affect students' entrepreneurial learning and development in South-East universities, was rejected. Therefore, the alternate hypothesis is accepted. This implies that AI applications significantly affect students' entrepreneurial learning and development in South-East universities.

Discussion of Findings

The test of hypotheses revealed that Artificial Intelligence (AI) applications significantly influence research in business and entrepreneurship education in South-East universities. Specifically, the findings showed that AI tools for data analysis, market research, and digital simulations enhance the quality of students' research by improving data accuracy, analytical skills, and relevance to contemporary business challenges. These findings are consistent with Adu and Okeke (2022), who reported that business education students exposed to AI-assisted platforms such as business simulation software and chatbots significantly outperformed their counterparts taught through conventional methods in areas of innovation, business planning, and digital marketing. This implies that AI does not only support academic research but also improves entrepreneurial creativity, problem-solving, and survival skills among students.

In addition, the results of this study showed that AI applications significantly affect students' entrepreneurial learning and development. This aligns with Igomu, Kwaghbo, Nayela, and Elujekwute (2024), who found that AI plays critical roles in business education by providing personalized learning, intelligent tutoring systems, and automated grading, while also transforming entrepreneurship through predictive analytics, market research, and virtual assistants. Despite challenges such as poor AI literacy, infrastructural constraints, and high implementation costs, AI remains a vital driver of educational and entrepreneurial growth in Nigeria.

The findings also resonate with Martinez, Lopez, Gonzalez, Rivera, Chen, Suzuki, and Kim (2024), whose comparative study in Spain and Japan revealed that AI-driven platforms such as simulation games and predictive analytics significantly improved students' entrepreneurial intentions, decision-making, and innovative capacities. Their results demonstrated that AI fosters global competitiveness by equipping students with diverse entrepreneurial skills adaptable to cultural and economic contexts. This supports the present study's conclusion that integrating AI into business and entrepreneurship education in South-East universities prepares students for global digital economies.

Furthermore, the findings of Akinwale and Aremu (2024) corroborate the results of this study by showing that AI technologies enhance employability skills such as problem-solving, adaptability, and communication among business education students in Nigerian universities. Their mixed-methods study emphasized that AI-driven platforms, virtual internships, and collaboration tools enable students to develop competencies required for sustainable careers, though infrastructural and lecturer training challenges remain barriers. This further strengthens the argument that AI integration fosters career development and entrepreneurial readiness.

Conclusion

This study investigated the effect of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on research and entrepreneurial learning in business and entrepreneurship education across federal universities in South-East Nigeria. The findings revealed that AI applications significantly improve students' capacity for research, innovation, and entrepreneurial skill development. Specifically, AI-driven tools such as business simulation platforms, predictive analytics, and intelligent tutoring systems were found to enhance creativity, critical thinking, problem-solving, and

digital business competencies among students. The study concludes that business education students who are exposed to AI-assisted learning environments acquire stronger research abilities, entrepreneurial intentions, and employability skills compared to those relying solely on conventional teaching methods. Furthermore, the integration of AI with entrepreneurship education prepares students for diverse opportunities such as research excellence, self-employment, digital entrepreneurship, and corporate innovation. By combining AI literacy with entrepreneurial training, students are equipped to adapt to the demands of the global digital economy. Therefore, Artificial Intelligence serves as a vital catalyst for sustainable research, innovation, and entrepreneurial development in business education within Nigerian universities.

Recommendations

Based on the results and conclusion, the following recommendations were made by the researchers:

1. Universities in South-East Nigeria should incorporate Artificial Intelligence tools such as business simulation software, virtual assistants, and predictive analytics into entrepreneurship courses. This will enable students to develop practical entrepreneurial skills, strengthen innovation capacity, and enhance their preparedness for self-employment and the digital economy.

2. Business and entrepreneurship education departments should adopt AI-powered research platforms and provide training workshops for both students and lecturers. This will improve research quality, support evidence-based decision-making, and enhance students' ability to conduct innovative research that addresses contemporary economic and business challenges

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