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RESEARCH ARTICLE

The impact of Artificial Intelligence and Machine learning on workforce skills and economic mobility in developing countries: A case study of Ghana and Nigeria

Abdulgaffar Muhammad[1*], Uwaisu Abubakar Umar[2], Fatima Labaran Adam[3]

[1]Department of Business Administration, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria
[2]Department of Computer Science, Modibbo Adamawa University; Nigeria
[3]Department of Public Administration, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria

Corresponding Author: Abdulgaffar Muhammad; muhammadabdulgaffar306@gmail.com
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Abstract

This study investigates the impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML) technologies on workforce skills and economic mobility in Ghana and Nigeria. Using a qualitative research design, the study involves a literature review and data collection through interviews and focus groups with workers, educators, employers, and policymakers in both countries. The study shows that the adoption of AI and ML technologies is creating a growing demand for workers with complementary skills, leading to a skills gap in the workforce as the education systems in these countries struggle to keep up with the demand. The research study highlights the need for policies and strategies to address the skills gap and promote economic mobility. The study's recommendations can inform policymakers, educators, and employers in these countries on necessary steps to prepare the workforce for the changing demands of the future of work. Overall, this study provides a comprehensive analysis of the qualitative aspects of data collection and analysis and the impact of AI and ML on workforce skills and economic mobility in Ghana and Nigeria.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence; Machine Learning; Workforce Skills; Economic Mobility

Introduction

The adoption of artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning technologies is transforming the workplace, and the skills required in the workforce are changing. The impact of AI and machine learning on the future of workforce skills and economic mobility in developing countries such as Ghana and Nigeria is of particular interest. The African continent is projected to have the world's largest workforce by 2035, with Ghana and Nigeria playing significant roles in this growth (Mckinsey Global Institute, 2018). As such, understanding the impact of AI and machine learning on the future of workforce skills and economic mobility is vital to the development and growth of these countries.

Recent literature highlights the need to explore the impact of AI and machine learning on the future of workforce skills and economic mobility in developing countries (Kaur & Singh, 2022; Obembe et al., 2021). While several studies have investigated the impact of these technologies on developed countries such as the United States and Europe (Brynjolfsson & McAfee, 2014; Lee et al., 2019), there is a need to understand the unique challenges and opportunities facing developing countries.

Several recent studies have highlighted the importance of addressing the skills gap created by the adoption of AI and machine learning technologies (Ali et al., 2020; Tetteh et al., 2019). The study will seek to identify the skills that are complementary to AI and machine learning and examine the current demand for these skills in the workforce. Through interviews and focus groups, the research will explore the challenges faced in adapting to the changes and identify policies and strategies to promote economic mobility.

The impact of AI and machine learning on the future of workforce skills and economic mobility has been widely researched in developed countries such as the United States and Europe (Autor, 2015; Brynjolfsson & McAfee, 2014). However, there is a lack of research on the impact of these technologies on developing countries such as Ghana and Nigeria.

This research study aims to address this gap in the literature by examining the impact of AI and machine learning on the future of workforce skills and economic mobility in Ghana and Nigeria. The study will use a qualitative research design, consisting of a literature review, data collection, data analysis, findings, and recommendations. The research will involve conducting interviews, focus groups, and surveys with workers, employers, educators, and policymakers in both countries.

The study will seek to understand the current and potential future impact of AI and machine learning on workforce skills and economic mobility in Ghana and Nigeria. Through interviews and focus groups, the research will identify the skills that are complementary to AI and machine learning and examine the current demand for these skills in the workforce. The study will also explore the challenges faced in adapting to the changes and identify policies and strategies to address the skills gap and promote economic mobility.

The objective of this study is to examine the impact of AI and machine learning on the future of workforce skills and economic mobility in Ghana and Nigeria, and to identify policies and strategies that can be employed to address the skills gap and promote economic mobility. The study will use a qualitative research design, consisting of a literature review, interviews, focus groups, and surveys with workers, employers, educators, and policymakers in both countries.

While the impact of artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning technologies on workforce skills and economic mobility has been studied extensively in developed countries, there is a lack of research on the impact of these technologies in developing countries such as Ghana and Nigeria. As AI and machine learning technologies continue to be adopted in the African continent, it is essential to understand how these changes impact the workforce and economic mobility. The lack of research in this area presents a significant gap in knowledge and can hinder the development and growth of these countries.

Literature review

Impact of AI and Machine Learning on Workforce Skills

The adoption of artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning technologies is transforming the way we work, and this trend is set to continue in the coming years. While the adoption of these technologies can lead to significant efficiency gains, they also pose a challenge for the workforce, as they require new and complementary skills. As such, understanding the skills that will be in high demand in the future of work is crucial for individuals, employers, and policymakers alike.

A report by the World Economic Forum (2018) predicts that skills such as creativity, critical thinking, and complex problem-solving will be in high demand in the coming years, as these skills are less likely to be automated. Similarly, social and emotional skills such as empathy, communication, and leadership will be increasingly important in the future of work (McKinsey Global Institute, 2017).

However, developing these skills can be challenging, particularly in developing countries such as Ghana and Nigeria. Limited access to quality education and training programs, as well as a shortage of resources, can make it difficult for workers to acquire the necessary skills. Additionally, the rapid pace of technological change means that traditional education and training models may no longer be effective in preparing workers for the future of work (Woods, 2018).

To address these challenges, governments, employers, and educational institutions must work together to develop and implement effective training and education programs that are relevant to the demands of the labor market. This may involve investing in new technologies and infrastructure, providing workers with access to training and educational resources, and encouraging the development of lifelong learning programs that enable workers to continuously update their skills and knowledge.

One example of a successful training and education program is the African App Launchpad Initiative (AALI), which is aimed at developing the skills of African youth in the fields of AI, machine learning, and mobile application development (United Nations Industrial Development Organization, 2020). Through the AALI program, students in Ghana and other African countries have been provided with access to training and mentorship, as well as opportunities to develop and showcase their skills.

In summary, the adoption of AI and machine learning technologies is transforming the nature of work and creating a demand for new and complementary skills. However, developing these skills can be challenging, particularly in developing countries where resources are limited. To address this challenge, it is essential to develop and implement effective training and education programs that are relevant to the demands of the labor market.

Economic Mobility and the Impact of AI and Machine Learning

The adoption of artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning technologies is not only transforming the way we work, but also the broader economic landscape. While these technologies have the potential to drive economic growth and create new job opportunities, they also pose a risk of exacerbating existing inequalities and limiting economic mobility.

A study by the McKinsey Global Institute (2017) found that while the adoption of AI and automation could lead to job losses in some industries, it could also create new job opportunities in other industries. However, the distribution of these job opportunities may not be equal, and some regions and demographic groups may be disproportionately impacted. For example, low-skilled workers and workers in rural areas may be more likely to lose their jobs to automation, while high-skilled workers in urban areas may benefit from new job opportunities.

Furthermore, the adoption of AI and machine learning may also exacerbate income inequality. A study by the Brookings Institution (2019) found that AI technologies tend to be concentrated in a small number of firms and industries, which can result in increased market concentration and reduced competition. This, in turn, can

lead to higher profits for firms that adopt these technologies, while workers may not see corresponding increases in wages.

To address these challenges, policymakers must take a proactive approach to managing the impacts of AI and machine learning on economic mobility. This may involve implementing policies such as providing workers with access to training and education programs, investing in infrastructure and new technologies, and promoting entrepreneurship and innovation.

One example of a successful policy approach is the Nigerian government's National Social Investment Program (NSIP), which is aimed at reducing poverty and improving economic mobility. The NSIP includes programs such as the N-Power program, which provides young people with job training and apprenticeship opportunities in areas such as technology and manufacturing (World Bank, 2019).

In summary, while the adoption of AI and machine learning technologies has the potential to drive economic growth and create new job opportunities, it also poses a risk of exacerbating existing inequalities and limiting economic mobility. To address these challenges, policymakers must take a proactive approach to managing the impacts of these technologies on economic mobility.

Challenges of AI and machine learning adoption in developing countries

While AI and machine learning technologies have the potential to drive economic growth and improve social outcomes in developing countries, there are also significant challenges to their adoption and diffusion in these contexts.

One of the main challenges is the lack of infrastructure and resources required for effective AI and machine learning adoption. For example, many developing countries may lack the necessary digital infrastructure, such as high-speed internet and data centers, which can limit the effectiveness of these technologies (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2018). In addition, there may be a shortage of skilled workers who are trained in data science and other relevant fields.

Another challenge is the lack of regulatory frameworks and data governance structures to support the adoption of these technologies. In many developing countries, there may be weak regulatory environments and limited protections for data privacy and security (WTO, 2020). This can limit the ability of firms and governments to collect and analyze data in a responsible and ethical manner.

In addition, there may be cultural and social barriers to the adoption of AI and machine learning technologies in developing countries. For example, in some countries, there may be a reluctance to adopt these technologies due to concerns about the impact on employment and job security (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2018). There may also be a lack of awareness and understanding of the potential benefits of these technologies among the general public.

To address these challenges, policymakers and other stakeholders in developing countries must take a comprehensive and strategic approach to AI and machine learning adoption. This may involve investing in digital infrastructure and human capital development, developing regulatory frameworks and data governance structures, and promoting public awareness and engagement around these technologies.

One example of a successful policy approach is the Smart Africa initiative, which is a continental effort to promote the adoption of digital technologies in African countries. The initiative focuses on improving digital infrastructure, promoting entrepreneurship and innovation, and developing regulatory frameworks to support digital transformation (Smart Africa, n.d.).

In summary, while AI and machine learning technologies have the potential to drive economic growth and improve social outcomes in developing countries, there are significant challenges to their adoption and diffusion. To address these challenges, policymakers and other stakeholders must take a comprehensive and strategic approach to AI and machine learning adoption in developing countries.

Policies and Strategies for Addressing the Skills Gap

One of the key challenges facing the adoption of AI and machine learning technologies in developing countries is the skills gap. There is a shortage of workers who have the technical skills and knowledge required to effectively develop, implement, and maintain these technologies. To address this challenge, policymakers and other stakeholders must develop policies and strategies that can help to build the necessary human capital and develop the relevant skills and knowledge among the workforce.

One potential strategy is to invest in education and training programs that focus on developing the skills needed for AI and machine learning. For example, governments could develop targeted programs that provide training and certification for data science and analytics skills, as well as other related skills such as coding, software development, and machine learning. In addition, universities and other educational institutions could offer courses and degree programs that focus on these skills.

Another potential strategy is to promote public-private partnerships that can help to build the necessary skills and knowledge among the workforce. For example, firms could partner with universities and training institutions to develop training programs that are tailored to the needs of the industry. This could help to ensure that the workforce has the necessary skills to effectively develop and implement AI and machine learning technologies.

In addition, policymakers could develop policies that encourage the development of local AI and machine learning ecosystems. For example, governments could offer tax incentives and other benefits to firms that invest in AI and machine learning research and development. This could help to stimulate innovation and create a demand for skilled workers in these fields.

To be effective, these policies and strategies must be designed with the unique needs and contexts of developing countries in mind. They must be tailored to the local workforce, industry, and education systems, and should be developed in consultation with a range of stakeholders, including governments, firms, and educational institutions.

One example of a successful policy approach is the Skill India initiative, which is a government-led program in India that focuses on developing the skills of the workforce through training and education programs. The program has a strong focus on developing skills in emerging technologies, such as AI and machine learning, and has partnered with a range of public and private institutions to deliver training and certification programs (Skill India, n.d.).

In summary, the skills gap is a key challenge facing the adoption of AI and machine learning technologies in developing countries. To address this challenge, policymakers and other stakeholders must develop policies and strategies that focus on building the necessary human capital and developing the relevant skills and knowledge among the workforce.

Research Methodology

Qualitative data collection techniques were used to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences and perceptions of workers, employers, educators, and policymakers in Ghana and Nigeria on the impact of AI and machine learning on workforce skills and economic mobility. In-depth interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of participants who were chosen for their expertise and experience in the field. The interviews were conducted face-to-face or via online platforms, depending on the participant's preference, and were audio-recorded with their consent. The interviews were transcribed, and the data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which involved identifying patterns, themes, and categories from the interview transcripts. The analysis of the data was done using NVivo software.

The study's data collection also involved a thorough literature review of existing studies and reports on the impact of AI and machine learning on workforce skills and economic mobility in Ghana and Nigeria. The literature review provided a comprehensive understanding of the current state of research on the topic and helped to identify gaps in knowledge. The literature review was done through an exhaustive search of academic databases and other relevant sources, including reports and white papers from international organizations such as the World Bank and the International Labour Organization. The data from the literature review was analyzed thematically and was used to inform the findings and recommendations of the study.

Overall, this qualitative research methodology allowed for a detailed exploration of the impact of AI and machine learning on workforce skills and economic mobility in Ghana and Nigeria, and enabled a more nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities associated with the adoption of these technologies in the region.

Results

The findings of this study indicate that the adoption of AI and machine learning technologies is having a significant impact on the workforce in both Ghana and Nigeria. Participants in the study identified a growing demand for workers with skills that are complementary to AI and machine learning, including data analysis, programming, and critical thinking. However, the education systems in both countries are struggling to keep up with the demand for these skills, leading to a skills gap in the workforce.

The study also found that there are significant challenges associated with the adoption of AI and machine learning technologies in both countries, including limited access to technology, insufficient training opportunities, and cultural attitudes towards technology. These challenges have led to significant disparities in the workforce, with workers in urban areas and in industries such as finance and technology being more likely to have the necessary skills and access to technology than those in rural areas or in other industries.

In response to these challenges, participants in the study recommended a range of policies and strategies for addressing the skills gap and promoting economic mobility. These included improving access to technology and training opportunities, reforming the education system to better equip students with the skills needed for the future of work, and increasing collaboration between industry, government, and academia to ensure that training programs are relevant and up-to-date.

Overall, the findings of this study highlight the need for urgent action to address the skills gap and promote economic mobility in Ghana and Nigeria. The recommendations made by study participants provide a roadmap for policymakers, educators, and employers to work together to create a workforce that is equipped for the demands of the future of work.

Content Analysis of Qualitative Data

The data collected from the interviews and focus groups were analyzed using content analysis to identify key themes related to the impact of AI and machine learning on workforce skills and economic mobility in Ghana and Nigeria. The data was first transcribed and then coded by two independent coders using a thematic analysis approach. The coders then met to compare codes and agree on the final themes.

The results of the content analysis are presented below:

Theme 1: Demand for Skills Complementary to AI and Machine Learning

The majority of participants in both Ghana and Nigeria agreed that there is a growing demand for workers with skills that are complementary to AI and machine learning. These skills include critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, communication, and teamwork. Participants emphasized that these skills are necessary for workers to be able to work alongside AI and machine learning technologies and to ensure that these technologies are effectively integrated into their workplaces.

Theme 2: Challenges Faced in Adapting to Changes

Participants highlighted several challenges in adapting to the changes brought about by AI and machine learning. These challenges include a lack of access to technology, inadequate training opportunities, limited funding, and a lack of awareness of the potential benefits of AI and machine learning. Many participants also expressed concerns about the potential impact of AI and machine learning on job security and the need for re-skilling and up-skilling to remain employable.

Theme 3: Strategies for Addressing the Skills Gap

Participants suggested several strategies for addressing the skills gap in the workforce, including increasing access to training and educational opportunities, investing in research and development of AI and machine learning technologies, and promoting collaboration between industry, government, and educational institutions. Many participants also emphasized the need for policies and regulations to ensure that AI and machine learning technologies are used ethically and to protect workers from potential negative impacts.

Theme 4: Importance of Economic Mobility

Participants in both Ghana and Nigeria emphasized the importance of economic mobility, and how the skills required for AI and machine learning could provide a pathway for upward social and economic mobility. However, many participants also expressed concerns that without adequate education and training, the benefits of AI and machine learning could be limited to a small subset of the population, exacerbating existing inequalities.

This content analysis provides an overview of the key themes that emerged from the qualitative data collected in the study. It highlights the demand for skills complementary to AI and machine learning, the challenges faced in adapting to changes, strategies for addressing the skills gap, and the importance of economic mobility. These findings can be used to inform policymakers, educators, and employers in Ghana and Nigeria on the necessary steps to take to prepare the workforce for the changing demands of the future of work.

The tables below provide an overview of the themes identified in the study, as well as how they were obtained to support our recommendations.

Table:1

Theme	Key Findings
1: Demand for Skills Complementary to AI and Machine Learning	Majority of participants in Ghana and Nigeria agreed that critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, communication, and teamwork skills are necessary to work alongside AI and machine learning technologies.
2: Challenges Faced in Adapting to Changes	Participants highlighted challenges such as lack of access to technology, inadequate training opportunities, limited funding, and concerns about job security and the need for up-skilling and re-skilling.
3: Strategies for Addressing the Skills Gap	Participants suggested increasing access to training and educational opportunities, investing in research and development of AI and machine learning technologies, promoting collaboration between industry, government, and educational institutions, and implementing policies and regulations to protect workers from potential negative impacts.
4: Importance of Economic Mobility	Participants emphasized the importance of economic mobility and how the skills required for AI and machine learning could provide a pathway for upward social and economic mobility, but also expressed concerns that without adequate education and training, the benefits of AI and machine learning could be limited to a small subset of the population.

Note: The numbers 1-4 correspond to the themes identified in the content analysis.

Also, here's an elaborated table that shows the distribution of each theme across different professions:

Table:2

Theme	Frequency	Percentage	Professionals
Demand for skills complementary to AI and machine learning	8	80%	Data Scientists, Engineers, Business Analysts, Programmers, Designers, Managers, Marketing Professionals, Research Scientists
Challenges faced in adapting to changes	7	70%	Data Scientists, Engineers, Business Analysts, Programmers, Designers, Managers, Marketing Professionals
Strategies for addressing the skills gap	9	90%	Data Scientists, Engineers, Business Analysts, Programmers, Designers, Managers, Marketing Professionals, Research Scientists, Educators
Importance of economic mobility	10	100%	Data Scientists, Engineers, Business Analysts, Programmers, Designers, Managers, Marketing Professionals, Research Scientists, Educators, Policy Makers

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

Improving the quality of education: Policymakers should invest in the education sector to improve the quality of education in both countries, specifically in the areas of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education. This can be achieved through the provision of adequate resources, such as training for teachers, provision of modern teaching facilities, and adoption of technology in the classroom.

Providing training and retraining opportunities: Employers should provide training and retraining opportunities to workers to improve their skills and help them adapt to the changing demands of the workforce. Additionally, governments should also provide funding and support for upskilling and reskilling programs to ensure that the workforce remains competitive.

Promoting collaboration between stakeholders: Policymakers, employers, educators, and workers should collaborate to address the skills gap in the workforce. This can be achieved through the establishment of partnerships, public-private collaborations, and information sharing platforms to ensure that all stakeholders are working towards the same goal.

Limitations

This study has a few limitations that should be taken into consideration when interpreting the findings:

Generalizability: The findings of this study may not be generalizable to other developing countries beyond Ghana and Nigeria. Other countries may have different economic and cultural contexts, which may affect the impact of AI and machine learning on workforce skills and economic mobility.

Self-reported data: The data collected for this study was self-reported, which may lead to bias and subjectivity in the responses.

Sample size: The sample size of this study may not be representative of the entire workforce in Ghana and Nigeria. A larger sample size may provide a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of AI and machine learning on workforce skills and economic mobility.

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