

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE TO CURTAIL POVERTY AND ATTAIN

SDG-1: LECTURERS' PERCEPTIONS

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Abstract

Poverty eradication, an essential component of SDG-1, utilizes AI in education as a transformative means to alleviate poverty through enhanced teaching efficiency, innovative learning methods and diminished inequalities. This study examines lecturers' perceptions of AI's role in combating poverty, employing a thematic analysis of interviews conducted with 50 participants. Five research questions guided the investigation, structured around an interview titled Lecturers' Perceptions of Using Artificial Intelligence to Curtail Poverty and Attain SDG-1 Interview (LPUAICPSI, IRR=.79) for data collection purposes. The findings reveal varying levels of awareness regarding AI in education. Whereas thirty respondents availed to the transformative potential of AI to curtail poverty, twenty admitted to having limited knowledge yet expressed a desire to learn more, highlighting the necessity for training, retraining, skilling and reskilling in AI utilization for SDG-1 attainment. Systemic issues like too much workload, insufficient resources, and trouble with new technologies were mentioned by forty-five lecturers as things that block resilience, equal education and AI utilization to curtail poverty and attain SDG-1. Lecturers pointed out that AI could help curtail poverty, but these problems must be fixed first. It was therefore recommended, among others, that institutional management arrange seminars, workshops, conferences and symposia on AI utilization to curtail poverty and enhance SDG-1 attainment. Curriculum developers and educational policymakers should also revamp educational curricula to include AI utilization for poverty alleviation and SDG-1 attainment.

Keywords: Poverty, Artificial Intelligence, Sustainable Development Goal-1 (SDG-1); Lecturers perception.

Introduction

Poverty in developing nations like Nigeria remains a multifaceted challenge deeply rooted in economic inequality, education gaps, health disparities, climate vulnerabilities, and governance issues. Economic inequality and unemployment are pervasive, with wealth concentrated among elites and urban areas while rural populations endure persistent poverty. Nigeria's youth, who form 60% of the population, face limited job opportunities due to an over-reliance on oil exports and weak economic diversification (Ayinla & Ogunmeru, 2018; Ighorhiohwunu & Igbesi, 2022). Inflation further exacerbates hardships, reducing access to basic necessities. Similarly, education disparities hinder poverty alleviation, as over 10 million children are out of school, with girls and rural communities disproportionately affected. Poor educational quality, insufficient funding, and inadequate infrastructure limit skill development, perpetuating cycles of poverty. Targeted investments in education, SME development, and vocational training are vital for addressing these challenges. Health and environmental vulnerabilities further complicate poverty reduction efforts.

Limited healthcare access, particularly in rural areas, traps families in cycles of poor health and economic hardship. Maternal mortality, infectious diseases, and insufficient health coverage exacerbate these issues. Simultaneously, climate change disrupts livelihoods through desertification, flooding, and reduced agricultural productivity, intensifying food insecurity for smallholder farmers, especially women. Governance weaknesses compound these problems, as corruption, inefficiency, and insecurity hinder effective poverty alleviation programs and service delivery. Misappropriation of funds and lack of basic infrastructure in rural areas perpetuate poverty, while conflicts destabilize communities (Ahmed & Yusuf, 2024; Akindele & Oluwafemi, 2023; Gonzalez & Ramirez, 2023; Mwangi & Otieno, 2022). Addressing these interlinked issues requires bold economic reforms, universal health insurance, climate-smart agriculture, anti-corruption measures, and improved public service delivery. By fostering good governance and sustainable development practices, Nigeria can make significant strides toward achieving SDG-1, ensuring a better future for its citizens. The eradication

of poverty remains a cornerstone of global development and one of the most pressing challenges of the 21st century. Recognizing its profound impact on human well-being, societal stability, and economic progress, the United Nations established Sustainable Development Goal 1 (SDG-1) to eliminate poverty in all its forms by 2030. Despite global efforts, poverty persists, especially in developing nations like Nigeria, where systemic challenges exacerbate inequalities (Adebajo et al., 2024; Charlene et al., 2024; Kolawole & Arifalo, 2024). Innovative approaches, such as artificial intelligence (AI), offer transformative potential to accelerate progress toward SDG-1. AI's ability to analyze vast datasets, identify patterns, and provide predictive insights enables targeted interventions, optimized resource allocation, and enhanced service delivery (Adesina et al., 2024; Fazal et al., 2024; Raimi et al., 2024). However, adopting AI in poverty alleviation faces socio-technical, infrastructural, and ethical challenges, including data privacy concerns, biases in AI systems, and risks of perpetuating inequalities. This study explores the perceptions of lecturers in Oyo town, Nigeria, regarding AI's potential to curtail

poverty and advance SDG-1. Lecturers in higher education are key thought leaders, shaping societal attitudes toward emerging technologies and training future professionals. Their awareness, attitudes, and ethical considerations about AI play a critical role in fostering supportive environments for its adoption. Despite AI's promise, limited research examines its socio-cultural dimensions, particularly how educators perceive its application in poverty reduction efforts. This study addresses this gap by investigating lecturers' readiness to integrate AI into education and research initiatives aimed at alleviating poverty. By shedding light on these perceptions, the research seeks to bridge the gap between theoretical possibilities and practical applications of AI for sustainable development in Nigeria and beyond.

The study on artificial intelligence (AI) to curtail poverty and attain SDG-1 draws on key theoretical frameworks to understand lecturers' perceptions and how these can drive AI adoption for poverty reduction. The Diffusion of Innovations Theory (Everett Rogers, 1962) provides insight into how new technologies spread across cultures and adopter categories like innovators and early

adopters. It helps analyze lecturers' readiness and strategies for AI adoption to combat poverty. Complementing this is the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Fred Davis et al., 1989), which emphasizes perceived usefulness and ease of use as determinants of technology acceptance. This model is crucial in assessing how lecturers' perceptions of AI's utility shape its integration into poverty alleviation strategies. Meanwhile, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Abraham Maslow, 1943) underscores AI's capacity to address basic and higher-level human needs by improving access to food, healthcare, and education, aligning with the overarching goals of SDG-1.

Building on this foundation, the Capability Approach (Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum, 1980s) frames poverty as a deprivation of capabilities rather than income alone. AI's potential to enhance access to education and healthcare aligns with this perspective, emphasizing empowerment and human development. The Systems Theory (Ludwig von Bertalanffy, 1940s) further highlights AI's role in addressing interconnected systemic issues like education, healthcare, and economic opportunities. This perspective allows

lecturers to view AI adoption as a holistic intervention to tackle poverty. Lastly, Human Capital Theory (Gary Becker and Jacob Mincer, 1964) focuses on investments in education and skills as pathways to economic productivity. AI is positioned as a tool to enhance human capital by expanding access to quality education and skill development. These theories collectively provide a comprehensive framework for understanding lecturers' perceptions of AI's role in poverty reduction and its alignment with SDG-1. Together, they underscore the systemic, individual, and institutional dimensions necessary for leveraging AI to foster sustainable development.

Empirically, Mhlanga (2020) reported of the global poverty rate has decreased to 10% in 2015, averred that reducing it to less than 3% by 2030 remains unattainable. AI is enhancing poverty reduction in poverty maps, agriculture, education, and digital financial inclusion. Vinuesa et al. (2020) paper analyzed how AI can support or hinder the achievement of each SDG, providing a comprehensive overview of AI's potential impacts on sustainable development. Floridi and Chiriatti (2020) explored the capabilities of AI language models like GPT-3 and their

implications for various sectors, including education and policy-making related to poverty reduction. Palomares et al. (2021) explored the link between artificial intelligence and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through literature review and SWOT analysis, identifying strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, and discussing prospects for positive AI developments by 2030. Walshe et al. (2021) UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals in 2015 introduced emerging technologies like AI, which are now prioritized for sustainability, fairness, inclusiveness, efficiency, and usability. Policy makers and managers must consider AI's potential for achieving SDGs, but a balanced approach is needed to avoid negative impacts.

Also, Mhlanga (2021) examined AI's role in achieving Sustainable Development Goals in emerging economies, highlighting its impact on poverty reduction, innovation, and infrastructure. He submitted that AI enhances data collection, agriculture, education, and financial inclusion, thus recommended increased government investment in AI to advance innovation, infrastructure development, and poverty alleviation.

Zavyalova and Krotova (2021) alluded that poverty prevents individuals from meeting basic needs, including food, education, and employment, thus eradicating poverty is central to the UN's 2030 Agenda (SDG1), therefore reviewed assessment methods of government efforts and proposes an econometric model to achieve SDG1 within the next decade towards curtailing poverty. Yeh et al. (2021) in an empirical study surveyed educated individuals in Taiwan to understand their perceptions of AI and its links to the SDGs, highlighting the importance of education in constructing sustainable AI-aided communities. Dwivedi et al. (2021) comprehensive review highlighted the challenges and opportunities of AI across various sectors, including education and poverty alleviation, and proposed agendas for future research.

Moreover, Ezekiel and Akinyemi (2022) investigated University of Ibadan lecturers' perception of AI in education, revealing positivity despite reservations. Lecturers are willing to adopt AI, prompting recommendations for training programs to enhance understanding and equip institutions with modern technologies. These efforts aim to boost confidence and competence in

leveraging AI for education. Ali et al. (2023) affirmed that Artificial intelligence (AI) offers immense potential to improve lives but also poses significant disruptions and ethical challenges. They thus explored AI's impact on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through interviews with 1,000 Selangor lecturers. Thematic analysis revealed AI's dual nature—categorized as "good," "evil," or "harmful"—and its role in healthcare, education, and energy. Findings underscore AI's opportunities, trade-offs, and critical implications for sustainability and high-tech enterprises.

Still, Mhlanga (2023) examined FinTech and AI's role in achieving SDGs, particularly SDG 1 on poverty reduction. He highlights AI's impact on financial inclusion, efficient aid delivery, and secure transactions while supporting SMEs. Policymakers and researchers are urged to explore innovative approaches to leveraging AI and FinTech for sustainable development. Stahl et al. (2023) stated that artificial intelligence (AI) offers transformative potential for achieving UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) like “Zero Hunger” through efficient agriculture, they however pinpointed its high energy demands and inequitable impacts, such as job

losses and credit denial, risk deepening inequality. Collaborative efforts are essential to harness AI for global equity and sustainable development.

Furthermore, Kaur and Kumar (2023) identified that artificial intelligence (AI) significantly impacts the global economy and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), addressing issues like hunger, poverty, and climate change. AI aids in waste management, pollution control, agriculture, and biodiversity preservation. However, its high energy demands and carbon footprint require regulatory oversight to ensure eco-friendly advancements for sustainable environmental and societal progress. Wang et al. (2023) posited that since 2015, 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have been formulated to address global issues like poverty, inequality, and pollution that engineers and scientists play a growing role in solving these challenges, with extensive research on AI-enabled techniques, they however identified less research existence on generative AI's potential for sustainable community living. Mary and Binu (2024) identified that sustainability involves meeting current needs without compromising future generations' ability to meet their own.

It includes social equity and economic development. That Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aim to eradicate poverty, protect the planet, and ensure global peace by 2030 and that AI should benefit society, economy, and environment, aligning with the SDGs.

Likewise, Oguejiofor and Eze (2023) examined lecturers' views on how digital literacy can aid in poverty alleviation, emphasizing the need for integrating digital skills into educational curricula to combat poverty. research demonstrated how AI, combined with satellite imagery, can accurately predict poverty levels, aiding in targeted interventions for poverty alleviation. Oguejiofor and Eze (2023) examined lecturers' views on how digital literacy can aid in poverty alleviation, emphasizing the need for integrating digital skills into educational curricula to combat poverty. research demonstrated how AI, combined with satellite imagery, can accurately predict poverty levels, aiding in targeted interventions for poverty alleviation.

In addition, Elias et al. (2024) explored the transformative role of AI in FinTech for achieving UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). AI-driven innovations

enhance financial inclusion, poverty reduction, and growth while addressing challenges like data privacy and bias. Recommendations emphasize ethical use, regulatory frameworks, and collaboration to build an inclusive, sustainable global financial ecosystem. Fazal et al. (2024) explored the role of artificial intelligence (AI) in enhancing financial inclusion, a critical enabler for achieving 8 of the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Using qualitative methods, it highlights AI's potential to reduce poverty and boost growth, urging policymakers to prioritize AI-driven financial infrastructure for sustainable development. Tripathi and Saxena (2024) examined the impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on sustainable development, focusing on its potential benefits and potential compromises on the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, highlighting the potential for a peaceful future or conflict.

Statement of the Problem The eradication of poverty, more specifically the notion of alleviating its impact, is captured in Sustainable Development Goal 1 set by the UN which aims to end 'poverty in all its forms' by 2030. The inter-generational focus imbibed in this goal seeks to ensure that no

person faces the dire conditions that, for example, a large population currently residing in extreme poverty, as in the case of Nigeria, does or has to endure in the future. Finding solutions is crucial, especially when considering the challenges that many nations face in terms of leverage AI. With its exciting characteristics that allow for improved resource management, AI can be instrumental. The struggle here, though, will arise in the form of socio technical and cultural challenges, to name just a few. Thoughts on artificial intelligence have a strong connection with the way its future application by the younger generation is determined. It is important to note that there is still a scarcity of measurable data on the application of AI as a strategic tool targeted toward poverty focused interventions. Another issue is there exists an abysmal gap in knowledge on the lecturers' perceptions regarding the applicability of AI informed educational and research responses oriented towards SDG-1. These only bolstered by technology gap and lack of funds among other things, make the pursuit of achieving the desired goals even more imperative.

Contextual factors like institutional support and societal attitudes are critical to AI

integration. Additionally, ethical considerations, including risks of perpetuating inequalities, underscore the need for responsible AI use. Lecturers' ability to bridge the digital divide depends on technological self-efficacy and institutional resources. This study thus aims to explore lecturers' perceptions of AI's potential in poverty alleviation in Oyo town, Nigeria, the findings will provide insights to inform policies, capacity-building programs, and interdisciplinary collaborations. By bridging gaps in understanding and application, this research will contribute to achieving SDG-1 through sustainable and equitable AI-driven solutions, fostering resilience in poverty eradication efforts.

Objectives of the Study

The main thrust of the study is to investigate lecturers' perceptions of artificial intelligence to curtail poverty and attain SDG-1 in Oyo town, Nigeria. The specific objectives of the study are: to:

- i. Examine the lecturers' awareness of artificial intelligence in curtailing poverty and attaining SDG-1;
- ii. Assess the challenges to lecturers' awareness of artificial intelligence in curtailing poverty and attaining SDG-1

- iii. Evaluate the lecturers' perceptions of the potential benefits of artificial intelligence in curtailing poverty and attaining SDG-1;
- iv. Identify the lecturers' perceptions of the potential risks and uncertainties in artificial intelligence in curtailing poverty and attaining SDG-1;
- v. Project the lecturers' perceptions of the future of artificial intelligence in curtailing poverty and attaining SDG-1

Research Questions

The following research questions were answered in the research:

1. What is the lecturers' awareness of artificial intelligence in curtailing poverty and attaining SDG-1?
2. Are there challenges to lecturers' perceptions of artificial intelligence in curtailing poverty and attaining SDG-1?
3. What are lecturers' perceptions of the potential benefits of artificial intelligence in curtailing poverty and attaining SDG-1?
4. Do the lecturers perceive any potential risks and uncertainties associated with artificial intelligence in curtailing poverty and attaining SDG-1?
5. How do lecturers perceive the future of artificial intelligence in curtailing poverty and attaining SDG-1?

Methodology

The study is a qualitative research method in phenomenological design. The design is appropriate for investigating the lecturers' perception of the phenomenon of artificial intelligence in curtailing poverty and attaining SGD-1 in Oyo town, Nigeria. The population of the study comprises of all the lecturers in Oyo town, Nigeria out of which a 50 sample were selected using accidental sampling technique. A researchers-constructed ten-item instrument titled: Lecturers' Perceptions of Using Artificial Intelligence to Curtail Poverty and Attain SDG-1 Interview (LPUAICPSI) was used for data collection. The instrument, LPUAICPSI was given to experts in psychometrics for face and construct validity, the scale was reduced to five items. The validated LPUAICPSI was rated by two experts and the inter-rater reliability yielded a value of 0.79. The researchers as well as their assistants secured the informed consent from the prospective interviewees after which recording sections were held with the lecturers as they were found at their respective offices. The collated data was subjected to thematic analysis.

Results

Theme 1: The Understanding of Lecturers about the Relevance of AI in Addressing Poverty and Activating the SDG -1 Impacts.

While thirty respondents indicated great knowledge concerning AI as an approach to poverty reduction strategy, fifteen admitted possessing rudimentary knowledge on AI applications in poverty alleviation. On the other hand, five interviewees claimed that they had lack of awareness and exposure to AI applications such as training on programs related to AI. Such answers indicate lack of uniformity on the level of awareness showing a clear dichotomy of those who are engaged in AI discussions and those who do not practically know such effects.

Theme 2: Existing Problems that Influence AI understanding among the lecturers Strategies to Help the Poor and Activating SDG-1 at Implementation Stage.

While twenty-five respondents pointed out AI applicability challenges due to infrastructural insufficiencies, ten mentioned lacks of sufficient training as a major discouragement towards AI's functionality. Also, fifteen case studies pointed out that societal doubts and cultural misconceptions regarding AI are hindrances to greater incorporation. Such issues indicate deeper

difficulties that limit lecturer's ability to visualize and support AI's role in achieving SDG number one.

Theme 3: AI's Ability to Alleviate Poverty: Experts in the Field's Predictions

While relaying their responses, thirty of the respondents emphasized how AI could impact how resources are managed and add to the overall synergies put in place to curb poverty. In addition, fifteen pointed out that it may also enhance education and create more opportunities. Besides, five lecturers pointed out that AI can also have real time data on what needs to be done to rectify economic imbalances. The impressions above seemingly imply that, while most lecturers are aware of the positive aspects of AI, their comprehension levels with respect to the areas of its application seem to differ from one another.

Theme 4: Potential Risks and Uncertainties Associated with Artificial Intelligence in Curtailing Poverty and Attaining SDG-1

On the other hand, twenty-eight respondents said that they are not well informed about AI, together with the risks of ethics while reinforcing already existing imbalances. In addition, seventeen of the respondents explained about the risk of being inaudible

due to data privacy edges. Moreover, this topic was raised by five lecturers claiming the replacement of people's jobs, thereby aggravating unemployment. These comments indicate concerns that arise as a result of using artificial intelligence in the fight against poverty whereby AI is expected to be beneficial and effective.

Theme 5: Lecturers' Perceptions of the Future of Artificial Intelligence in Curtailing Poverty and Attaining SDG-1

Majority of the respondents thirty-five hold a rather dystopian picture where AI is employed in poverty alleviation practices in the future. However, ten stated that success depends on addressing current resource and moral challenges. On the other hand, 5 were skeptical about whether or not AI technology will ever be part of poverty reduction programs in the underdeveloped countries. In general, the conclusions indicate a rather optimistic attitude laced with concerns about existing problems.

Discussion

The study underscores the critical role of artificial intelligence (AI) in curtailing poverty and achieving Sustainable Development Goal 1 (SDG-1). The findings reveal a nuanced understanding among

lecturers in Oyo town, Nigeria, regarding the potential and challenges of integrating AI into poverty alleviation strategies. Lecturers demonstrated varying levels of awareness and understanding of AI's applications in poverty reduction. While a majority acknowledged AI's transformative potential, some participants admitted limited knowledge. This discrepancy highlights the need for targeted educational initiatives to bridge the knowledge gap. These findings align with previous research that emphasizes the importance of capacity-building programs to enhance AI literacy among educators (Mhlanga, 2023; Ezekiel & Akinyemi, 2022).

The study identifies key challenges that hinder AI's broader acceptance and implementation. These include infrastructural deficits, insufficient training, and societal misconceptions about AI. These issues resonate with systemic barriers documented in global studies, such as the lack of digital infrastructure in developing economies (Fazal et al., 2024). The findings also highlight cultural and ethical concerns, including data privacy risks and the potential for job displacement, reinforcing the

importance of addressing these barriers to foster AI integration (Stahl et al., 2023).

The respondents' insights into AI's potential reveal optimism about its ability to improve resource allocation, enhance education, and promote economic equity. However, ethical considerations, such as bias in AI systems and exacerbation of inequalities, remain significant concerns. These dual perspectives underscore the importance of adopting a balanced approach that maximizes AI's benefits while mitigating risks, as recommended by researchers like Ali et al. (2023).

The lecturers' perceptions of AI's future in poverty alleviation reflect cautious optimism. While many believe in AI's transformative potential, the success of its implementation depends on addressing current challenges. This finding aligns with global discussions on leveraging AI responsibly for sustainable development (Palomares et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2023).

The study's thematic analysis provides valuable insights into the socio-cultural and institutional dimensions of AI adoption in poverty reduction efforts. By highlighting the perspectives of educators—key drivers of technological and societal change—it

contributes to the broader discourse on integrating AI into sustainable development strategies. The findings emphasize the need for a multi-stakeholder approach involving educators, policymakers, technologists, and community leaders to harness AI's potential effectively. Addressing the identified gaps and challenges is imperative for creating an enabling environment where AI can be a catalyst for poverty eradication, aligning with SDG-1 goals. Further research exploring the long-term impacts of AI and its scalability in diverse contexts will provide deeper insights into its role in fostering sustainable development.

Conclusion

The findings of this study reveal a mixed perception among lecturers regarding the role of artificial intelligence (AI) in curtailing poverty and achieving Sustainable Development Goal 1 (SDG-1). While a majority recognize AI's potential for poverty alleviation, disparities in awareness and comprehension of its applications are evident. Challenges such as infrastructural deficiencies, lack of training, and societal misconceptions hinder broader acceptance and implementation. Despite these obstacles, many lecturers view AI as a transformative

tool capable of improving resource allocation, education, and economic balance. However, concerns about ethical risks, data privacy, and job displacement highlight the complexities of integrating AI into poverty reduction strategies. The future of AI in this domain is seen as cautiously optimistic, contingent on addressing current barriers and fostering a supportive environment for its application.

Recommendations

1. Enhance AI Awareness and Training:

- Develop capacity-building programs tailored for lecturers to improve their understanding of AI and its applications in poverty alleviation.

- Organize workshops, seminars, and training sessions focused on practical AI tools and their relevance to SDG-1.

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2. Address Infrastructural Gaps:

- Strengthen institutional support by providing access to necessary digital infrastructure and resources.

- Encourage partnerships with technology providers to equip educational institutions with AI-driven platforms.

3. Promote Ethical AI Use:

- Introduce modules on ethical AI practices in training programs to address concerns about data privacy, equity, and job displacement.

- Advocate for policies that ensure responsible AI implementation, minimizing risks of perpetuating inequalities.

4. Foster Collaboration Among Stakeholders:

- Encourage interdisciplinary collaborations among educators, technologists, policymakers, and non-governmental organizations to create a comprehensive AI strategy for poverty alleviation.

- Establish forums for knowledge exchange and joint problem-solving.

5. Leverage AI for Data-Driven Decision-Making:

- Utilize AI to collect and analyze real-time data on poverty dynamics, enabling targeted interventions.

- Develop AI-driven systems for monitoring resource distribution and evaluating program impacts.

6. Promote Public Awareness Campaigns:

○ Address societal misconceptions about AI through community outreach programs and awareness campaigns that highlight its benefits and address fears.

7. Conduct Further Research:

- Explore the long-term impacts of AI on poverty reduction and its scalability in diverse contexts.
- Investigate the implications of AI on employment and propose mitigation strategies for potential displacement effects. By implementing these recommendations, stakeholders can bridge existing gaps, enhance lecturers' capacity to utilize AI, and contribute to achieving SDG-1 through innovative and ethical AI-driven solutions.

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