Artificial Intelligence, Peace, and Sustainable Development: Perspectives and Expectations of Final-Year Students at the University of Lagos

SHEIDU OLAREWAJU KAMORU, PH.D.[1], OJO DOTUN, M.SC. M.ED[2], OJO ABIMBOLA CAROLINE, M. ED[3], MUSTAPHA SAIDAT YEWANDE, M. ED[4], AKALI BARTHOLOMEW, M. ED[5]

[1]*Department of Social Sciences Education, Faculty of Education University of Lagos*

[2]*Department of Maritime Transport and Business Management, Federal College of Fisheries and Marine Technology Lagos, Nigeria*

[3, 4, 5]*Department of Social Sciences Education, Faculty of Education University of Lagos*

Abstract- ***The emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has significantly altered human interaction, education, peace processes, and pathways to sustainable development. This paper explores the intersection of AI, peace, and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) from the perspectives of final-year undergraduate students at the University of Lagos. Using a content analysis approach, this study investigates students' expectations and interpretations regarding AI's role in peacebuilding and sustainability. Findings reveal that students recognize both the opportunities and threats posed by AI, expressing optimism for its educational benefits but concern over ethical, employment, and security implications. The paper advocates for a deeper integration of AI ethics, peace education, and sustainability studies into Nigerian higher education.***

Index Terms- ***Artificial Intelligence, Peacebuilding, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Higher Education, Student Perception, AI Ethics, Nigeria, Content Analysis***

I. INTRODUCTION

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is fundamentally reshaping modern society. From healthcare and transportation to education and governance, AI is redefining processes and transforming human capabilities (Vinuesa et al., 2020). These advancements intersect deeply with global development frameworks, especially the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which seek to eradicate poverty, promote peace, and ensure sustainable futures by 2030 (United Nations, 2024).

AI's contribution to the SDGs is two-fold. On one hand, it enhances resource efficiency, strengthens data-driven decision-making, and supports scalable innovation. On the other, it introduces new risks—digital inequality, surveillance, algorithmic bias, and job displacement— which can undermine development, exacerbate conflict, and hinder peace (UNESCO, 2023).

In tandem, peace and sustainable development are increasingly seen as interdependent. Peace is essential to human capital development, infrastructure resilience, and equitable growth. Conflict, on the other hand, disrupts education, health systems, and governance structures (Galtung, 1996). AI-powered peace technologies are already being deployed for early warning systems, real-time conflict analysis, and ceasefire monitoring (UNDP, 2023). However, AI is also being misused— deepfakes, misinformation, and AI-generated propaganda have fueled election interference and civil unrest in Nigeria and across Africa (Zuboff, 2022; Conventions, 2025).

AI is utilized to bolster authentic education by tackling traditional wicked problems, including fostering student engagement and inclusion, customizing knowledge delivery, and providing adaptive feedback on the learning process(Elbrashy, 2023).

AI could assist teachers by minimizing the time spent on tasks like grading assignments,

addressing common queries, and recording attendance. This would enable them to dedicate more time providing assistance to individual learners(Rachit Dhiman 1, 2024). Nonetheless, AI presents a multitude of intrinsic risks and ethical dilemmas, including the replacement of human labor, the widespread collection and manipulation of personal data, and an increase in cyber terrorism.

Since AI offers significant opportunities and challenges, it necessitates attention to and a greater number of empirical cases and discussions derived from different stakeholders in the development sector, presenting the growing connection between AI and the development agenda, positioning the roles of AI, recognizing inhibiting aspects and dangers to be dealt with, and putting into action steps to achieve the complete promise of social effect(Kim, 2025) .

In spite of these and other related beneficial facets, AI also encompasses detrimental elements, several of which are especially troubling for Africa. Since AI is a general-purpose technology, it can also be used for harmful purposes. This has led to a growing number of worries about generative AI in particular, and its connections to disinformation, cyber security risks, hate speech aimed at women and marginalized groups, and the stirring up or provocation of violence amid crises and wars. As an example, reports indicate that deep fakes utilizing AI-driven voice and image technologies are employed to imitate political figures for the dissemination of false information during elections in Nigeria and amid the ongoing civil war in Sudan. AI technologies might also be utilized to enhance cyber-attack capabilities and to create bioweapons and weapons of mass destruction.(Conventions, 2025)

Nonetheless, the aspects that ought to be included in the dominant conversation about AI's part in promoting development are primarily derived from the macro viewpoint and policy-level debate. It is largely unclear how present-day students, who are digital and AI natives as well as equal partners and actors in sustainable development, interpret the possibilities and difficulties of using AI to attain SDG and peace.

Despite these macro-level developments, the voices of university students—especially those in developing contexts—remain largely absent from the discourse. As digital natives and future leaders, their expectations and concerns about AI's alignment with peace and sustainability are critical for shaping inclusive policies and pedagogical frameworks.

This study, therefore, explores how final students at the University of Lagos conceptualize the relationships between AI, peace, and sustainable development, and how they expect these forces to shape their future and Nigeria's broader socio-economic trajectory.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Artificial Intelligence and Higher Education

AI has become an indispensable tool in education, offering personalized learning paths, automating administrative tasks, and enabling intelligent tutoring systems (Luckin et al., 2016). In higher education, AI applications support course recommendation engines, predictive analytics for student success, and AI-powered chatbots for student queries (Holmes et al., 2021).

Slimi (2023) observed that AI's influence could lead to a reshaping of academic disciplines, particularly where automation threatens traditional roles. Humanities and creative fields, less susceptible to automation, may gain prominence. Similarly, Santos (2023) noted that AI can address educational inequities through adaptive learning platforms and language-processing tools.

However, students also face anxiety over data privacy, algorithmic grading, and the potential replacement of academic jobs by AI (Selwyn, 2019). The debate thus centers on leveraging AI’s benefits while maintaining ethical safeguards.

Peace and Student Development

Peace is a cornerstone for societal advancement. It ensures institutional stability and unlocks investment in education, health, and infrastructure (OECD, 2020). In fragile states, conflicts have led to disrupted schooling, displaced populations, and economic regression.

Peace education, as Udeozor (2022) explains, cultivates emotional intelligence, empathy, ethical awareness, and civic responsibility. It empowers youth as agents of change. Paul (2011) posited that integrating peace into school curricula reduces susceptibility to violence and promotes social cohesion. By integrating peace education into the curriculum, schools can better educate students about the underlying causes of conflict, foster empathy, tolerance, and peaceful conflict resolution, and motivate them to take part in creating a culture of peace both locally and internationally. Students must actively participate and work together to end violence and advance understanding as part of this education, which goes beyond only teaching them about conflicts. Additionally, education for peace boosts young people's cognitive and psychological growth, enabling them to act as change agents and promote sustainable development. It also promotes the concepts of justice, equity, and national unity, which assist address major causes of conflict like poverty and social injustice.

In the Nigerian context, peace education must also confront ethno-religious tensions, political instability, and youth unemployment—factors that can be amplified by digital misinformation and AI-generated propaganda.

Artificial Intelligence, Peacebuilding, and Sustainable Development

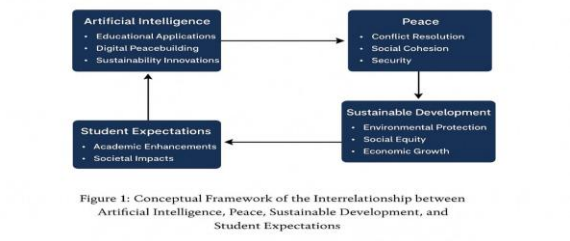

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of the Interrelationship between Artificial Intelligence, Peace, Sustainable Development, and Student Expectations

The convergence of AI with peace and development is gaining scholarly attention. The UNESCO Mahatma Gandhi Institute for Peace and Sustainable Development (MGIEP) has emphasized the transformative potential of AI in education and peacebuilding (UNESCO MGIEP, 2024).

AI is currently used in:

- Conflict mapping and predictive analytics.
- Monitoring human rights violations using satellite imagery.
- Identifying hate speech on social platforms.
- Supporting humanitarian aid logistics.

However, scholars like Zuboff (2022) and Kim (2025) warn that without ethical frameworks, AI can exacerbate inequalities, promote surveillance capitalism, and undermine democracy.

For sustainable development, AI contributes to:

- Smart agriculture.
- Renewable energy optimization.
- Real-time environmental monitoring.

Enhancing health systems and disease surveillance (Vinuesa et al., 2020).

Nevertheless, Africa faces unique challenges. Limited data infrastructure, digital illiteracy, and external technological dependencies create a vulnerability gap. Deepfake campaigns, especially during Nigeria's 2023 elections, illustrate how AI misuse can derail democratic processes and peace efforts (BBC Africa Eye, 2023).

Student Perceptions and Expectations of AI

Contemporary undergraduate students increasingly perceive Artificial Intelligence (AI) as a transformative force in education, governance, and economic life. Among 400-level students at the University of Lagos, AI is generally viewed as an enabler of personalized learning, real-time feedback, and academic efficiency. AI-driven tools such as intelligent tutoring systems, learning management bots, and automated

assessment platforms have been praised for their ability to adapt instructional content to different learning styles, paces, and cognitive needs (Ibrahim, 2024). This adaptive capability aligns well with students' demand for individualized and flexible learning environments.

Moreover, students frequently associate AI with productivity, automation, and futuristic progress, echoing broader global discourses. However, they also raise growing concerns about data privacy, surveillance, job loss, and AI's potential to deepen inequalities (Adegbite & Omolade, 2022). These perceptions highlight a dual awareness: while students anticipate AI improving learning outcomes, they also recognize ethical and infrastructural challenges that could affect its successful integration in Nigeria.

Importantly, students' expectations of AI are discipline-dependent. Research by Akinyemi and Okafor (2023) shows that students in STEM disciplines are more optimistic and eager to participate in AI's development, whereas those in the humanities are more attuned to its ethical, philosophical, and social implications. This disciplinary lens shapes students' sense of agency in contributing to responsible AI ecosystems.

As future educators, developers, and policymakers, students' engagement with AI is critical. Their perspectives not only shape classroom interactions but could also influence policy dialogues on digital education, peacebuilding, and sustainable development. Ensuring their meaningful participation in these discussions is therefore essential for developing inclusive and resilient digital futures.

Sustainable Development, Higher Education, Peace, and Artificial Intelligence

The intersection of Artificial Intelligence (AI), higher education, peacebuilding, and sustainable development is increasingly recognized as a transformative space in global discourse. This convergence addresses the urgent call to respond to multifaceted global challenges—ranging from climate change to political instability—through integrative, technological, and human-centered strategies (Vinuesa et al., 2020; UNESCO, 2024).

Higher education institutions (HEIs) play a critical mediating role in this convergence. They are not only knowledge producers but also drivers of social change, equipped to bridge innovation with ethics, and policy with practice. As AI becomes more embedded in educational and societal structures, HEIs are tasked with producing graduates who are not only technologically competent but also socially responsible and peace-conscious (Holmes et al., 2021; Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019).

AI technologies are rapidly reshaping educational delivery models. Through smart classrooms, personalized learning platforms, and real-time analytics, AI is enhancing student engagement and enabling data-informed educational interventions. These innovations are especially relevant in countries like Nigeria, where access to quality education is often uneven and under-resourced (Ibrahim, 2024). By leveraging AI tools, HEIs can democratize learning, bridge achievement gaps, and accelerate human capital development—core goals of Sustainable Development Goal (Quality Education) (UNESCO, 2023).

However, technology alone is not sufficient. Peacebuilding and ethical governance must be embedded in the digital transformation of education. UNESCO's Mahatma Gandhi Institute for Education for Peace and Sustainable Development (MGIEP) has advocated for integrating AI and digital pedagogies with socio-emotional learning (SEL), ethical leadership, and global citizenship education. This model promotes peace as a foundational pillar of sustainable development (UNESCO MGIEP, 2024).

Higher education institution thus act as incubators of critical consciousness, where students are encouraged to question systems, understand conflicts, and co-create solutions. Mudiwa (2025) emphasizes that the inclusion of peace studies in the curriculum enhances students' competencies in dialogue, negotiation, and ethical problem-

solving—skills necessary for both professional life and civic engagement.

Furthermore, interdisciplinary collaboration is essential. AI applications in climate modeling, agriculture, healthcare, and governance offer pathways for HEIs to engage students in real-world problem-solving aligned with the SDGs. Institutions that combine engineering, social sciences, and humanities in AI-related research can better address issues of algorithmic bias, digital inequality, and socio-political instability—barriers that hinder development and peace (Akinyemi & Okafor, 2023; Latonero, 2018).

Despite the promise, several challenges persist. In the Global South, including Nigeria, digital infrastructure gaps, unequal access to AI literacy, and lack of regulatory frameworks constrain the potential of HEIs to leverage AI for peace and development (Adegbite & Omolade, 2022). Additionally, concerns around surveillance, academic freedom, and ethical misuse of AI in educational settings must be addressed proactively.

To fulfill their potential, HEIs must:

- Embed AI ethics and peace education into general curricula.
- Train faculty and students in responsible innovation.
- Foster community-engaged research that links academic inquiry to societal needs.
- Form global and regional partnerships to share best practices and develop culturally responsive AI solutions (Wynants, 2025; World Economic Forum, 2024).

AI, when aligned with inclusive educational values, can enhance the role of HEIs as agents of peace and sustainable development—not just through technological adoption but through humancentric innovation, critical dialogue, and empowerment of youth as co-creators of peaceful and equitable futures.

Ethical Principles: Ai Framework for Higher Education

As AI becomes deeply embedded in university systems, there is a growing need for a robust ethical framework to guide its adoption in academic settings. The proposed AI Framework for Higher Education serves as a flexible and evolving guide to ensure the ethical application of AI across diverse institutional contexts (Wynants, 2025). This framework emphasizes critical reflection, institutional transparency, human-centered innovation, and continuous learning.

Major Key Ethical Dimensions for AI in Higher Education Investigating and Assessing AI Use

The critical evaluation of AI systems before implementation is foundational to responsible technology adoption in education. Faculty, administrators, and students must collaboratively assess the utility, accuracy, fairness, and potential harms associated with AI tools. This involves understanding how algorithms function, what data they are trained on, and the biases that might be embedded within them (O'Neil, 2016).

Research has shown that AI systems can reflect and amplify social, racial, and gender biases if left unchecked (Buolamwini & Gebru, 2018). For instance, grading tools may inadvertently penalize non-standard language use, and predictive analytics may mislabel at-risk students due to skewed historical data.

To mitigate these risks, higher education institutions must promote AI literacy as a core digital competency (Holmes et al., 2021). This includes training stakeholders to identify and question AI outputs, understand the limitations of machine learning models, and apply ethical reasoning in decision-making processes involving AI.

Regular impact assessments and bias audits should be institutionalized to evaluate both the intended and unintended consequences of AI tools in academic settings (Raji et al., 2020). These assessments must be iterative, not one-off,

ensuring AI systems evolve in alignment with ethical and educational goals.

"The goal is not to reject AI, but to ensure that AI operates within a transparent and accountable framework that centers student dignity and academic integrity." (Vincent et al., 2023)

Openness and Responsibility

Transparency is a key tenet of ethical AI governance. Universities must clearly communicate when AI is used—for grading, admissions, plagiarism detection, learning analytics, or administrative decisions—and explain how these technologies work (Wynants, 2025).

A lack of transparency can lead to student mistrust, reduced autonomy, and perceived surveillance, especially in contexts where AI is embedded invisibly into digital platforms (Selwyn, 2022). Institutions should develop clear AI policies and governance charters, making them accessible to all stakeholders—students, faculty, administrators, and external partners.

An important aspect of openness is the disclosure of algorithmic limitations. This includes informing users about:

- The nature of the data being collected.
- The purpose for which the data is used.
- The logic of automated decisions or recommendations.

Wynants (2025) emphasizes the creation of AI audit systems to review the efficacy, fairness, and impacts of AI deployments. These audits should not be limited to technical evaluations but should also incorporate student feedback and cross-departmental input to reflect diverse needs and experiences.

Furthermore, mechanisms for reporting grievances related to AI use should be institutionalized. Whether a student feels misrepresented by a predictive tool or a faculty member questions the validity of an AI-generated recommendation, there must be clear channels for appeal and redress. Human-Centered Approaches

In ethical AI design and deployment, human agency must remain central. While AI can enhance educational efficiency and personalization, it should not replace human judgment in decisions that significantly affect individuals, such as academic progression, disciplinary actions, or psychological evaluations (UNESCO, 2023).

This aligns with the principle of "human-in-the-loop" design—where humans remain involved in reviewing, interpreting, and finalizing AI-assisted outputs (Floridi et al., 2018). Human-centered AI emphasizes:

- The interpretability of algorithms.
- The contextual judgment of educators and administrators.
- The well-being and dignity of students as the ultimate users.

In mental health services, for example, AI-powered chatbots or sentiment analysis tools can screen for early warning signs, but the final intervention must involve qualified professionals (Larsen et al., 2021). Moreover, educators must be empowered to critically question and override AI suggestions where necessary. AI should assist teaching, not constrain it. For instance, an AI recommendation to remove a student from a course due to predicted failure must not bypass a teacher's contextual understanding of the student's circumstances.

Ethical AI must thus be grounded in empathy, inclusivity, and respect for human dignity, resisting the reduction of education to algorithmic efficiency.

Innovation and Ongoing Learning

To ensure AI in education remains relevant and responsible, institutions must adopt a culture of continuous learning and adaptive governance. AI literacy is no longer optional—it is a strategic necessity in preparing students and faculty for the

evolving digital landscape (Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019).

This entails:

- Institution-wide professional development on AI tools and ethics.
- Embedding AI literacy modules into general education curricula.
- Facilitating cross-disciplinary research and collaboration on AI applications.

Ongoing learning fosters resilience against the risks of stagnation and technological obsolescence, ensuring that AI tools are regularly updated to reflect current best practices and societal needs.

Institutions must also build partnerships with industry and global networks to co-develop responsible AI solutions. For example, collaborations with AI firms can allow universities to pilot tools tailored to local needs while shaping global ethical standards (World Economic Forum, 2024).

In parallel, student-led innovation should be encouraged. Hackathons, AI ethics clubs, and incubator programs allow students to engage creatively and critically with AI technologies. These initiatives ensure that students are not just passive users but active co-creators of ethical AI futures.

By institutionalizing these four ethical dimensions—investigation, openness, human-centeredness, and continuous innovation—higher education can navigate the promises and pitfalls of AI in ways that uphold educational equity, academic integrity, and sustainable peace. As AI reshapes the fabric of learning, it is imperative that it does so with transparency, accountability, and human dignity at its core.

Finally, evaluation processes must remain iterative and evidence-based. Institutions should conduct longitudinal studies on the educational impact of AI and openly share findings with the public to inform global learning.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Diffusion of Innovation Theory (Rogers, 2003)

Everett Rogers' Diffusion of Innovation Theory explains how innovations—like AI—are adopted within social systems. According to Rogers (2003), adoption is influenced by an innovation's relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability, and observability. In the context of this study, the University of Lagos represents a dynamic educational ecosystem where the diffusion of AI depends on students' exposure, perceived benefits, and institutional support.

The theory helps explain why students' enthusiasm for AI varies across departments and individuals—those who perceive AI as compatible with their learning goals or career aspirations adopt it more readily than those who see it as disruptive or complex.

Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989)

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) posits that users' acceptance of technology is influenced by Perceived Usefulness (PU) and Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU). TAM is particularly relevant for analyzing student interactions with AI technologies in academic settings. If students believe that AI tools will enhance their academic performance (PU) and are easy to use without extensive training (PEOU), they are more likely to integrate them into their learning habits (Davis, 1989). TAM also provides a roadmap for higher education institutions to improve AI adoption. By increasing AI accessibility, providing training, and incorporating user feedback, universities can enhance student engagement and foster responsible digital citizenship.

Methodology Design

This study adopted a qualitative content analysis methodology to examine the perceptions and

expectations of final-year students at the University of Lagos regarding Artificial Intelligence (AI), peacebuilding, and sustainable development. Qualitative research was selected for its suitability in uncovering subjective meanings, experiences, and values that are embedded in students' personal reflections, rather than seeking statistical generalizations.

Unlike quantitative methods, which typically rely on numerical data to measure variables or test hypotheses, qualitative content analysis enables the researcher to interpret rich, textual data and draw nuanced insights from the participants' narratives. Given that the study aims to understand how students make meaning of AI technologies in relation to their learning, social realities, and future roles in society, a qualitative approach provides the most appropriate lens to capture the complexity, diversity, and emotional depth of their responses. It allows for a detailed exploration of how students perceive ethical challenges, technological transformation, and development goals in a way that is grounded in contextual understanding and lived experience.

The data were drawn from a purposive sample of final-year students' academic essays, classroom discussion transcripts, and reflective notes on topics related to AI, digital innovation, and development. These materials were generated as part of coursework and open-ended assignments across multiple disciplines. The sampling focused on ensuring diversity in gender, academic background, and exposure to digital tools to reflect a broad spectrum of student perspectives.

However, an inductive coding process was employed to analyze the textual data. Thematic content analysis was conducted by closely reading and interpreting the materials in several cycles. Codes were generated based on recurring ideas, emotional expressions, ethical concerns, and references to real-world contexts. These codes were then clustered into broader themes that reflected students' conceptualizations of AI's impact on education, employment, peacebuilding, and sustainable development.

The key thematic domains identified in the analysis included students' awareness of AI applications, perceptions of AI's influence on learning and assessment, fears of job displacement in the Nigerian context, expectations around AI's potential contribution to peace and governance, and perceived links between AI and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These categories were not pre-determined but emerged organically from the data, ensuring that the analysis was grounded in students' authentic voices.

Furthermore, students' reflections were interpreted through the theoretical lenses of Diffusion of Innovation Theory (Rogers, 2003) and the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Davis, 1989), which helped to explain how students adopt, resist, or critically evaluate AI innovations in educational and societal contexts.

By employing qualitative content analysis, this study does not seek to generalize findings to all Nigerian undergraduates. Instead, it aims to uncover deep, contextual insights that can inform future research, curriculum development, digital literacy initiatives, and ethical frameworks for AI deployment in education. This approach offers an opportunity to understand AI not just as a tool, but as a social and cultural phenomenon that is being actively negotiated by young people in higher education.

Discussion of Findings

This chapter presents the results of a qualitative content analysis of student-generated data, including essays, discussion transcripts, and reflective notes. The thematic analysis revealed five key domains: (1) awareness of AI applications, (2) perceptions of AI's educational impact, (3) concerns about AI and job displacement, (4) expectations of AI's role in peacebuilding, and (5) the perceived relationship between AI and sustainable development. Each theme is discussed below with supporting data and scholarly interpretation.

Awareness of AI Applications

Most students demonstrated a basic awareness of AI technologies and their growing relevance in various sectors of Nigerian society. Many associated AI with tools such as chatbots, automated customer service, smart assistants, facial recognition, and predictive analytics.

*"*We use AI every day on our phones. From autocorrect to ChatGPT, it's already part of our learning and social life. But I think we don't yet fully understand what it means or how deep it *can go."*
— Student Essay, 400-Level Economics Major

Some students linked AI to specific sectors such as healthcare, fintech, transportation, and education, indicating exposure through media, social platforms, and coursework. However, there was also evidence of information asymmetry, as students from arts and humanities disciplines expressed lower confidence in their knowledge of AI compared to STEM students.

This supports Akinyemi & Okafor's (2023) findings that students' understanding of AI is largely discipline-dependent. Moreover, according to Adegbite and Omolade (2022), AI literacy among Nigerian undergraduates often comes from informal sources such as YouTube, Tiktok, and social media, raising questions about the reliability of their knowledge.

Perceptions of AI's Educational Impact

A dominant theme in students' reflections was the positive impact of AI on learning processes, especially through tools that enhance engagement, support revision, or assist with difficult concepts. Many students welcomed AI's potential to personalize education, provide real-time feedback, and reduce academic pressure.

"AI has helped me improve my writing and my thinking. I use Grammarly and other tools to refine my work, and it saves time."
— Reflective Note, 400-Level English Major

"I see AI as a personal tutor. Sometimes I ask it questions I can't ask in class." — Discussion Transcript, 400-Level Engineering Student

These observations align with Ibrahim's (2024) conclusion that AI tools enhance educational personalization and support student autonomy. From the lens of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Davis, 1989), many students displayed high *Perceived Usefulness (PU)* and *Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU)*, which correlate with their intent to adopt AI in their academic routines. However, some students also noted dependency risks, questioning whether overreliance on AI tools might affect their ability to think critically or engage deeply with learning material.

Concerns about AI and Job Displacement

Concerns about job displacement and automation were strongly expressed by students across all disciplines. There was a shared anxiety that AI could replace human workers in fields such as banking, journalism, law, and even teaching.

"If AI is learning to write, teach, and even diagnose illness, then what jobs will be left for us?" — Essay, 400-Level Sociology Student

"In Nigeria, where unemployment is already high, AI might make things worse if we're not prepared." — Reflective Note, 400-Level Political Science Student

These sentiments reflect wider global debates about the labour market impacts of AI, particularly in the Global South. As Vanesa et al. (2020) assert, while AI offers enormous productivity gains, it may disproportionately affect low- and middle-skilled workers in developing countries. From the perspective of Diffusion of Innovation Theory (Rogers, 2003), such skepticism may represent the "late majority" or "laggards" resisting AI due to uncertainty, lack of institutional support, or perceived social cost.

Students called for more AI education, digital skill training, and curriculum reforms to prepare them for a technology-driven workforce

Expectations of AI's Role in Peace and Conflict Resolution

A nuanced theme in the data was the students' recognition of AI as a possible tool for promoting peace and improving security. Some students referenced AI's ability to analyze conflict trends, track misinformation, and aid humanitarian efforts.

"I think AI can help stop violence before it starts. If it can detect hate speech or monitor threats, then maybe crises can be avoided."
— Class Discussion, 400-Level Mass Communication Student

"Peacebuilding should be data-driven. AI can help monitor elections, or even check online fake news that causes violence."
— Reflective Essay, 400-Level History Major

This optimistic view mirrors findings by Conventions (2025), who argued that AI could support peace enforcement through early warning systems and conflict mapping. However, students also raised concerns about state surveillance, privacy violations, and the risk of AI being used as a tool of oppression.

Their responses suggest a balance between techno-optimism and digital rights awareness, indicating that students are not just passive observers but critical thinkers concerned with ethical deployment of AI in peace processes.

Connections Between AI and Sustainable Development

Students expressed varying degrees of understanding about AI's potential to address issues related to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Many viewed AI as instrumental in achieving goals related to education, health, and environmental management.

"If we train AI to solve real Nigerian problems like waste management or power supply, then development will speed up."
— Essay, 400-Level Environmental Science Student

"AI can help government monitor SDG progress. But we need our own data and not just foreign solutions."
— Focus Group, 400-Level Urban Planning Student

Their insights support the work of Vanesa et al. (2020) who found that 79% of SDG targets could potentially be accelerated through AI technologies. However, students were also aware of data sovereignty issues and the need for local innovation ecosystems to avoid technological dependence.

The analysis shows that students envision themselves as stakeholders in digital development, expressing a desire for inclusive innovation policies, equitable access, and AI-driven infrastructure that aligns with local priorities.

Synthesis and Reflection
Across all themes, student voices reflected hope, fear, curiosity, and critical engagement with the expanding role of AI in society. Their expectations were shaped by both global narratives of innovation and local realities of underdevelopment and unemployment. They called for a humancentered, ethically governed, and context-responsive approach to AI integration in education and governance.

Drawing from both the Diffusion of Innovation Theory (Rogers, 2003) and the Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989), it is clear that student adoption of AI is influenced by perceived benefits, institutional support, and socio-economic factors. Their narratives reveal a generation that is eager to harness technology but demands safeguards, education, and agency in the process.
Summary of Findings

This study explored the perceptions and expectations of 400-level undergraduate students at the University of Lagos regarding Artificial Intelligence (AI), its impact on peace, and its contribution to sustainable development. Adopting a qualitative content analysis approach, the study analyzed reflective essays, focus group discussions, and personal notes written by students to uncover their evolving awareness, values, and

concerns related to the growing integration of AI in society.

The findings reveal that students possess a broad yet uneven understanding of AI. While many demonstrated enthusiasms for AI's role in enhancing learning, improving service delivery, and advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), others expressed skepticism about its ethical risks, its potential to cause job displacement, and the threat it poses to privacy and human dignity. Several participants viewed AI as a tool that could contribute to peacebuilding through early warning systems, misinformation monitoring, and digital diplomacy. However, they also voiced concern over its use in mass surveillance and authoritarian control, especially within fragile political systems.

Students highlighted the positive impacts of AI on their educational experience, noting its value in providing personalized learning support and fostering independent inquiry. At the same time, they called for stronger institutional support, AI literacy programs, and ethical guardrails to ensure that AI use in Nigerian universities is inclusive, transparent, and human-centered.

The study also confirmed that student responses are shaped by their academic discipline, exposure to technology, and social realities. Students from STEM disciplines tended to focus on technical and application-oriented aspects of AI, while those in humanities and social sciences emphasized ethical, philosophical, and societal implications.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that final-year undergraduates in Nigeria, particularly those at the University of Lagos, are actively engaging with the possibilities and dilemmas of AI as it relates to peace and sustainable development. Their responses reflect a critical awareness that transcends technological optimism, grounding AI discourse in ethical responsibility, educational equity, and national development priorities.

The convergence of AI, peace, and sustainable development—as experienced through the eyes of students—presents both an opportunity and a challenge for higher education institutions. If wellgoverned, AI could transform universities into hubs for inclusive innovation, digital peacebuilding, and sustainable policy modeling. However, if poorly managed or deployed without ethical oversight, it could worsen inequalities, disempower learners, and disrupt already fragile systems of employment and governance.

Students do not see themselves merely as passive recipients of AI technologies; rather, they perceive themselves as future change agents, developers, educators, and policymakers. Their voices emphasize the urgent need for deliberate, contextualized, and human-centered AI frameworks that reflect both global ethics and local realities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are offered for higher education institutions, policymakers, and stakeholders in technology governance:

Higher education institutions in Nigeria should integrate AI literacy and ethics into all academic disciplines. Such cross-cutting education will empower students to understand not only how AI works, but also how it shapes society, governance, and the economy.

Universities should develop institutional frameworks for ethical AI use in education, research, and administration. These frameworks should prioritize transparency, human decision-making, and safeguards against bias, surveillance, and exclusion.

There is a pressing need to invest in interdisciplinary research that explores the intersection of AI, peace, and sustainable development. Faculties of education, engineering, social science, and humanities should collaborate to generate local solutions and inform global AI debates from an African perspective.

AI governance bodies, including the National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA), should involve students and youth-led

organizations in national consultations, regulatory discussions, and innovation summits on artificial intelligence and digital transformation.

To address fears of job displacement, universities should revise their curricula to include skills relevant to an AI-driven future. Emphasis should be placed on creativity, emotional intelligence, problem-solving, and digital entrepreneurship.

Technology companies and government agencies should partner with universities to pilot inclusive AI projects focused on SDGs, such as smart health diagnostics, climate change monitoring, and peace technology.

Finally, there should be continuous monitoring and evaluation of AI integration in education. Regular feedback loops involving students, faculty, and stakeholders are essential for adapting AI use in line with ethical, cultural, and developmental priorities.

Contribution to Knowledge

This study contributes to emerging literature on the socio-educational dimensions of AI in the Global South, especially from a youth-centered perspective. It expands our understanding of how university students in Nigeria conceptualize AI's promise and pitfalls, and it underscores the need for AI policy frameworks that are inclusive, context-aware, and grounded in sustainable human development goals.

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