

YOUTH AI SURVEY 2026

WORK, STUDY & LEISURE IN THE
AGE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

NIGERIA

COUNTRY POLICY BRIEF

This policy brief presents country-specific findings from the Youth AI Survey 2026, a multi-country study examining how young people aged 18-35 use, experience, and think about artificial intelligence. Conducted globally by Restless Development, the University of Cambridge Centre for Human-Inspired Artificial Intelligence, and Makerere University, the survey collected 1,864 responses from young people, primarily in Africa and South Asia, with the United Kingdom serving as a high-income country comparator.

This brief is intended for the national government, in-country NGO partners, international funders, technology companies, and youth organisations working in Nigeria. It draws on 151 Nigeria-level survey responses collected 4-22 March 2026 to surface actionable findings and recommendations in the Nigerian context.

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1. INTRODUCTION & COUNTRY CONTEXT

Country Context

Nigeria is Africa's most populous country and largest economy, with a youth-heavy population; roughly 70% of Nigerians are under 30, and one of the continent's most dynamic technology start-up ecosystems, having attracted around a quarter of all African tech start-up funding in 2021 (Kene-Okafor, 2022). By late 2025, Nigeria had approximately 109 million internet users, an online penetration rate of 45.5%, alongside 165 million active mobile connections; affordability remains a binding constraint, with the cost of an entry-level mobile broadband plan still more than double the UN's 2%-of-income affordability benchmark (International Telecommunication Union, 2024).

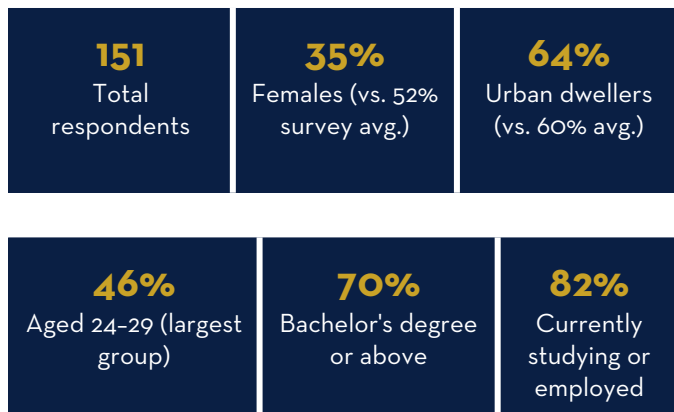
AI is now a formal national priority. Nigeria's National Artificial Intelligence Strategy (NAIS), published in September 2025 by the Federal Ministry of Communications, Innovation and Digital Economy with NITDA as key implementing body, sets a 2025-2029 vision to position Nigeria as a global leader in ethical, inclusive AI, with a specific target of equipping at least 70% of the young workforce (aged 16-35, including 50% females) with AI-related skills (Federal Ministry of Communications, Innovation and Digital Economy, 2025). This sits alongside the Nigeria Data Protection Act (2023), a draft NITDA Code of Practice for AI (2025), and proposed National AI Act legislation currently before the National Assembly (OECD AI Policy Observatory, 2026). Lagos's start-up scene, home to firms such as Flutterwave and Paystack, and government programmes like the NITDA-Google AI Fund and the Artificial Intelligence Research Scheme, are already channelling AI investment into agriculture, healthcare, education and financial services.

Against this backdrop of rapid policy formation and infrastructural strain, this brief draws on 151 survey responses from young Nigerians aged 18-35, collected online between 4-22 March 2026, to ground national AI strategy in the lived realities, uses and concerns of the young people it is designed to serve.

“ I use AI tools like ChatGPT, ClaudeAI, Gemini, Notebook LM, CapCut AI to write emails, books, design portfolios and also simple landing videos and create AI images and videos.

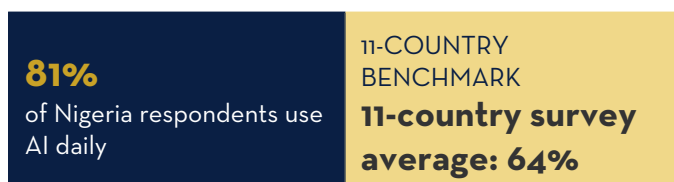
23-YEAR-OLD FEMALE, FULL-TIME EMPLOYEE,
URBAN NIGERIA

2. ABOUT THE RESPONDENTS



The Nigeria sample skews notably more male than the 11-country average, 64% males to 35% females, versus a near-even 47%/52% split across the full dataset, and is concentrated in urban areas (64% urban, 16% peri-urban, 19% rural). Respondents are highly educated relative to the wider population, with 70% holding a bachelor's degree or higher, and are predominantly aged 24-29 (46%), slightly older on average than the 11-country profile. The large majority (82%) are currently studying, employed, self-employed, or volunteering, with 14% seeking work. Given the male skew and urban concentration, findings in this brief, particularly gender comparisons, should be read as indicative of a digitally engaged, urban-leaning subset of Nigerian youth rather than as nationally representative.

3. HOW YOUNG PEOPLE IN NIGERIA USE AI



Nigerian youth report the most intensive AI engagement of any focus country in this dataset: 81% use AI tools daily, well above the 11-country average of 64%, and a further 17% use them at least weekly, meaning fewer than 1% of respondents have never used AI. This is consistent with 99% of respondents accessing the survey (and, by extension, AI tools) via their personal phone or laptop, the highest personal-device ownership rate recorded in the dataset.

Academic support (74%), creative work such as writing, coding and image generation (72%), and learning new skills (72%) are the leading uses, followed closely by improving day-to-day productivity (67%). Direct income generation lags well behind at 19%, above the 11-country benchmark referenced in the main report (14%) but still a fraction of the learning and productivity figures, underlining a persistent gap between AI adoption and AI-driven earnings. Finding work through AI sits at 37%.

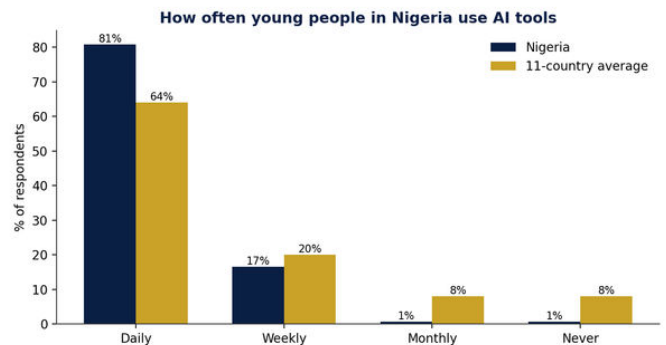


Figure A. How often young people in Nigeria use AI tools, vs. the 11-country average.

KEY FINDINGS: AI USE PATTERNS

- **Highest-intensity user base in the dataset:** 81% of Nigerian respondents use AI daily, the highest daily-use rate among the 11 focus countries, 17 percentage points above the 64% survey average.
- **Income gap persists despite heavy use:** Only 19% of Nigerian respondents report earning income directly through AI, despite 72% using it for productivity and 74% for academic support; the gap between everyday use and monetised use remains wide.
- **Minimal gender gap in reported AI knowledge:** 48% of males and 45% of females in Nigeria report 'a lot' of AI knowledge, a 3-point gap, far narrower than the 15-point gap (38% males vs. 23% females) recorded across the 11-country average. Both genders report unusually high self-assessed AI expertise.
- **Rural use lags slightly, but remains high:** 75% of rural respondents use AI daily, compared to 83% of urban and 79% of peri-urban respondents, a smaller urban-rural gap than seen elsewhere in the dataset, though rural connectivity barriers suggest this gap may widen as usage intensifies.

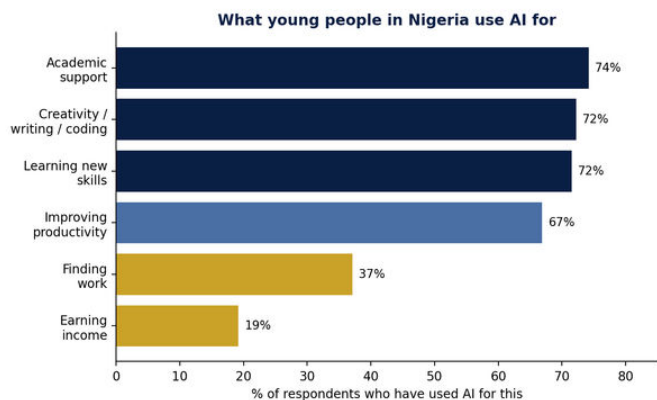


Figure B. What young people in Nigeria use AI for

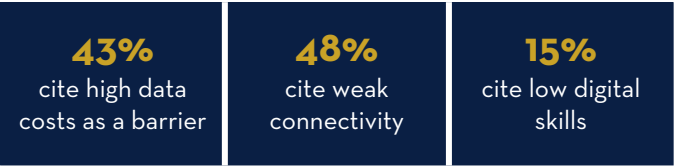
“ I use AI tools such as ChatGPT and other LLMs for educational purposes, work and creating videos. I am learning daily how wide AI is and the things it can do are amazing. I am looking to learn more and do more with AI.

31-YEAR-OLD FEMALE, FULL-TIME EMPLOYEE,
URBAN NIGERIA



4. WHO BENEFITS, WHO DOESN'T?

Barriers to AI Access



Weak internet connectivity (48%), not data cost (43%), is the single most-cited barrier to AI access in Nigeria. Nigeria is the one African focus country where high data costs are not cited by a majority of respondents, and that connectivity, rather than cost, is the primary constraint here (alongside Angola). Fear of scams (13%) and low digital skills (15%) are comparatively minor concerns.

Connectivity barriers are sharply higher outside cities: 71% of peri-urban and 54% of rural respondents cite weak connectivity, compared with 42% of urban respondents, a pattern that tracks directly with the rural/peri-urban dip in daily use noted in Section 3. A distinct, cost-related barrier surfaces strongly in open-ended responses, however: a cluster of respondents across urban, peri-urban and rural areas specifically named the cost of premium AI subscriptions and paywalled features, rather than general mobile data costs, as their key constraint.

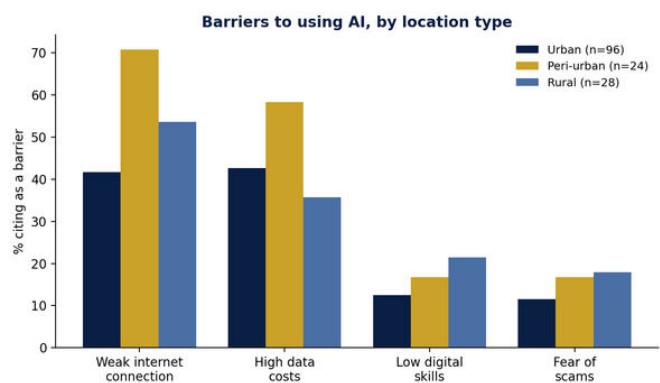


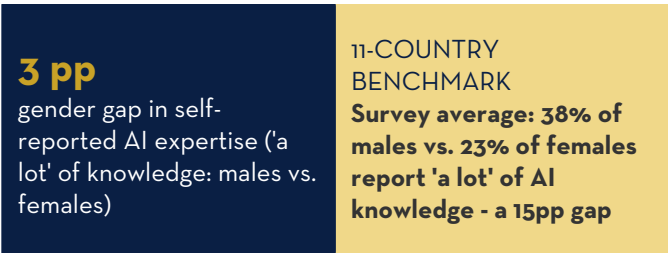
Figure C. Barriers to using AI, by location type (urban/peri-urban/rural)



“The cost of AI tools is ridiculously high, and even with the premium version, some still lack some features, which is embarrassing ... you need two to three AI tools to complete some tasks. I think that should be addressed.”

24-YEAR-OLD MALE, STUDENT, PERI-URBAN NIGERIA

Gender Gaps in AI Knowledge & Economic Impact



Nigeria stands out for having one of the narrowest gender gaps in self-reported AI expertise in the dataset: 48% of males and 45% of females report 'a lot' of AI knowledge, a 3-percentage-point gap versus the 15-point gap recorded across the 11-country average. Both genders report levels of self-assessed expertise well above the survey norm, suggesting Nigeria's high-intensity, urban-skewed sample may be dampening the confidence gap seen elsewhere, though this should be read alongside the sample's own gender skew (65% male), which likely inflates confidence in the aggregate figures for both groups relative to a more representative sample.

Regarding the impact of AI on income and employment, survey responses from Nigeria show a minimal gender gap: 52% of males and 46% of females report a high impact of AI on their income or economic opportunities.

Language

English dominates AI use in Nigeria: 99% of respondents use English to interact with AI tools, and 84% say they prefer English as their AI-interaction language, both far above the 11-country average of 65% preferring English. Still, 17% would like AI to work better in local languages (mainly Yoruba, Hausa, and Igbo, per open-ended responses), and several respondents specifically noted that AI tools default to generalised, Lagos-centric, or pan-African responses that flatten Nigeria's ethnic and linguistic diversity.

5. YOUNG PEOPLE'S AI CONCERNS

Across the full 11-country dataset, daily AI users are the most concerned about AI risks, not the least. This pattern holds in Nigeria too, though less dramatically given how few non-daily users remain in the sample: on data ownership, 64% of daily users express high ('a lot') concern versus 56% of weekly users; on the power of AI companies, the gap is narrower still (62% vs. 64%). With only 2 non-daily/never users in the entire Nigerian sample, this comparison carries limited statistical weight, but the direction is broadly consistent with the wider dataset's core finding that direct exposure raises risk awareness rather than dulling it.

Concern about AI runs high in Nigeria across all five domains tracked in the survey, and notably higher than the 11-country average on the top three: 61% express strong ('a lot') concern about who owns their data (vs. 52% average), 61% about the power of AI companies (vs. 50% average), and 53% about environmental impact (vs. 42% average). Concern about working conditions for AI data workers (37%) and mental health/wellbeing (32%) sit closer to, or slightly below, the survey norm.

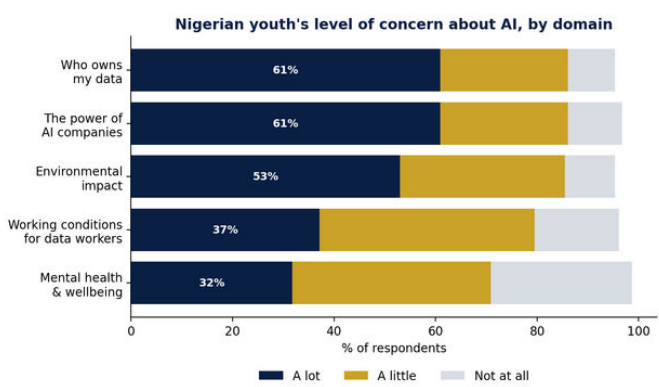


Figure D. Nigerian youth's level of concern about AI, by domain

Nigeria is also one of only three focus countries, alongside Sierra Leone and Tanzania, where this pattern of concern is gender-reversed: rather than females expressing the highest concern (as in the UK, India and most other countries), young males in Nigeria are consistently the most concerned.

Among respondents expressing high concern, males account for 63-70% across every one of the five domains, most pronounced for the power of AI companies (70% male) and data ownership (67% male), the most gender-skewed reversal recorded anywhere in the 11-country dataset.

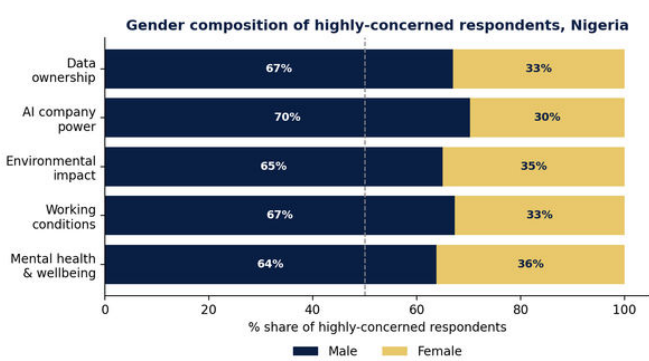


Figure E. Gender composition of highly-concerned respondents, Nigeria (share of those expressing 'a lot' of concern).

Misinformation & Safety



Concern about AI-generated misinformation is markedly higher in Nigeria than the 11-country average, 74% concerned versus 64% overall, placing Nigeria among the countries with the highest misinformation concern in the dataset, alongside the UK and India. On whether safety concerns actively limit AI use, Nigeria tracks the survey average almost exactly: 47% say yes, 27% sometimes, 25% no, with negligible difference between males and females on this question specifically.

What Would Make AI Safer?

Nigerian respondents' priorities for making AI safer closely mirror the 11-country pattern, with stronger laws (63%) and digital literacy training (60%) as the top two asks, both within a few points of the survey averages of 64% and 57% respectively. Platform accountability (58%) and better reporting systems (53%) rank slightly higher in Nigeria than the overall average (47% and 45%), while AI design that considers females (21%) sits close to the 23% survey norm. In open-ended responses, Nigerian respondents most often framed AI safety as a governance and regulatory challenge rather than a technical one, echoing the wider dataset's finding that young people prioritise restrictions, privacy protection, and enforcement over technical safeguards.

“ I do believe there is need for more AI governance and more policies to be put in place in ensuring its safe use. Also, there is need for a limit with the visual and audio-visual contents which are created with AI, I believe they are serving as a means of spreading fake news.

24-YEAR-OLD MALE, PART-TIME EMPLOYEE,
URBAN NIGERIA

6. EMPLOYMENT, FUTURES & SENTIMENT

91%
of Nigeria respondents expect AI to have a positive impact on education & learning in the next 5 years

11-COUNTRY BENCHMARK
11-country average: 71% expect positive impact on education

Nigerian youth are markedly more optimistic about AI's medium-term impact on their lives than the 11-country average across almost every dimension tracked. 91% expect AI to improve their education and learning over the next five years (vs. 71% overall), and 72% expect it to improve their employment and economic opportunities, well above the 50% survey average and one of the most optimistic employment outlooks recorded in the dataset. Only 12% expect employment to worsen. Views on online safety are more evenly split (34% better, 31% worse, 31% no change), aligning with the wider dataset's pattern of online safety as the domain of greatest ambivalence. On mental wellbeing, half of respondents (50%) expect no change, with more expecting improvement (36%) than deterioration (10%).

Situated in the wider 11-country leapfrog-versus-displacement spectrum described in the main report, where Uganda and Tanzania sit at the optimistic end and the UK shows the starkest pessimism about AI and work, Nigeria's results place it firmly among the more optimistic African focus countries, particularly on education and employment, even as its youth express some of the dataset's highest levels of concern about data ownership and corporate power.

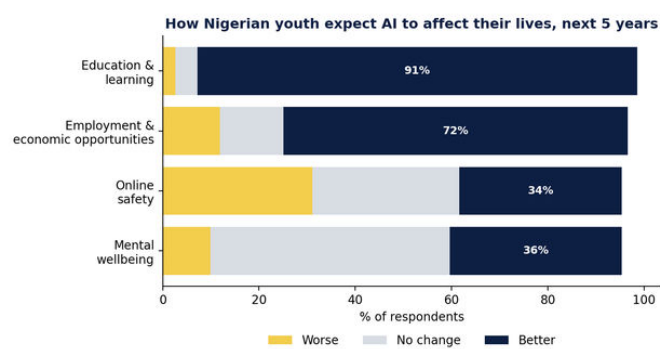


Figure F. How Nigerian youth expect AI to affect their lives over the next five years

7. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Three findings define Nigeria's position in this dataset. First, Nigerian youth are the most intensive AI users among the 11 focus countries, with adoption running well ahead of both the wider survey average and, on some measures, actual income benefit, a leapfrog dynamic that is real but not yet translating into earnings for most users. Second, Nigeria shows one of the dataset's most distinctive gender patterns: a near-closed gap in self-reported AI knowledge, but also the most pronounced gender reversal in AI concern anywhere in the survey, with young males consistently more worried than young females across every concern domain. Third, connectivity rather than cost is Nigeria's binding access constraint at the aggregate level, even as subscription and premium-feature costs emerge as a distinct, under-captured barrier in respondents' own words.

Taken together, these findings describe a youth population that is highly engaged with AI, cautiously optimistic about its economic potential, but sharply attentive to questions of data ownership and corporate power and whose concerns do not map neatly onto the gendered patterns assumed elsewhere in AI policy discourse. Nigeria's National AI Strategy, with its explicit 70%-of-youth-workforce skilling target and its emphasis on ethics and governance, is well aligned with what young Nigerians are asking for; the task ahead is translating stated policy ambition, and young people's own enthusiasm, into affordable connectivity, monetisable AI skills, and governance structures that treat youth concern about data and corporate power as a signal to act on, not a side effect to manage.

FOR THE GOVERNMENT OF NIGERIA

- Prioritise rural and peri-urban connectivity infrastructure investment (e.g. via the National Broadband Plan and Project 774 LG Connectivity) as the primary AI-access lever, given connectivity is Nigeria's leading barrier, especially outside urban centres (71% of peri-urban and 54% of rural respondents cite weak connections).
- Accelerate implementation of the National AI Strategy's youth-skilling target (70% of the 16-35 workforce, including 50% females), with specific emphasis on turning existing AI literacy into income-generating skills, given the persistent gap between AI use (81% daily) and AI-driven earnings (19%).
- Finalise the NITDA Code of Practice for AI and the proposed National AI Act with binding data-governance provisions, responding directly to the 61% of young Nigerians highly concerned about data ownership and 61% about the power of AI companies, both above the 11-country average.
- Commission further research into the gendered pattern of AI concern identified in this survey (young males more concerned than young females across all five domains) to inform targeted programming rather than assuming female-focused interventions by default, as is common elsewhere.

FOR TECHNOLOGY COMPANIES

- Review pricing models for premium AI features and subscriptions in the Nigerian market; open-ended survey responses point to subscription and paywall costs as a distinct barrier not captured by standard data-cost metrics.
- Invest in local-language and culturally-specific AI capability for major Nigerian languages (Yoruba, Hausa, Igbo), responding to respondent feedback that AI tools default to generalised, Lagos-centric, or pan-African outputs.
- Strengthen transparency around data use and corporate governance specifically for the Nigerian market, given data ownership and AI company power are Nigeria's top two concern domains, both above the survey average.
- Partner with NITDA's Artificial Intelligence Research Scheme and NCAIR to channel product development toward the sectors (agriculture, healthcare, education, financial services) already prioritised in national AI programming.

FOR ALL SECTORS (GOVERNMENT, CIVIL SOCIETY, FUNDERS, ACADEMIA)

- Fund independent research into why AI concern in Nigeria (Sierra Leone and Tanzania) is male-dominant rather than female-dominant as in most other focus countries.
- Support digital literacy and AI safety education initiatives, which 60% of Nigerian respondents identify as a priority for making AI safer, alongside stronger laws (63%) and platform accountability (58%).
- Invest in monetisation pathways such as freelance platforms, AI-enabled entrepreneurship support and digital payments infrastructure, that convert Nigeria's exceptionally high AI adoption into income, closing the 81%-use-to-19%-income gap.

FOR RESTLESS DEVELOPMENT & NGO PARTNERS

- Design youth programming around Nigeria's distinctive concern profile, data ownership and corporate power, given 91% of respondents remain optimistic about AI's impact on education and 72% on employment.
- Expand affordable-connectivity and device-access support for rural and peri-urban youth hubs, where daily AI use already reaches 75-79% but remains constrained by weak connections rather than lack of interest.
- Use Nigeria's near-closed gender gap in AI knowledge (3 points, vs. 15 points survey-wide) as a case study for what narrows AI confidence gaps elsewhere in the programme's other focus countries.
- Build local-language AI literacy content in Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo in partnership with in-country technology and civil-society partners, responding directly to respondent demand.

“While I believe AI is a good development done in this century, at the same time I have to acknowledge the harm AI has caused across the world, ranging from digital harm, environmental harm, changing the labour force system. We need to acknowledge the double-edged sword of this tool, but we need to get used to it. Mitigate the harms.

19-YEAR-OLD MALE, VOLUNTEER, URBAN NIGERIA

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Country-Specific Contact

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