



Artificial Intelligence Tools for Enhancing Academic and Psychological Student Support Services in Public Universities in Rivers State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study investigated artificial intelligence tools for enhancing academic and psychological student support services in public universities in Rivers State. Three objectives, three research questions and three hypotheses guided the study. The study adopted the descriptive survey design. The population of the study was 92,836 consisting of 92,570 students and 266 administrative staff across three universities. A sample of 541 respondents (382 students and 159 administrative staff) was selected through multi-stage sampling technique. The instrument was validated by three experts and yielded a composite Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient of 0.81. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions while z-test was employed to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. Findings revealed that all AI tools (AI-powered mental health systems, Predictive analytics systems and AI-enabled writing assistant tools) enhance student support services to a high extent. It also revealed no statistically significant difference between students and staff perceptions on two of the AI tools examined; however, a significant difference was observed in their perceptions of AI-enabled writing assistant tools. Based on the findings, it was recommended among others that University management and government should increase investment in robust digital infrastructure to support the deployment and effective utilization of AI-powered mental health systems to enhance students' emotional well-being, improve access to timely and confidential psychological support services and promote sustainable, accessible and responsive student support.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Psychological Student Support Services, Mental Health Systems, Predictive Analytics, Writing assistant Tools

INTRODUCTION

The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools in higher education has gained substantial attention in recent scholarly discourse, particularly regarding their potential to enhance student support services within public universities. In today's digital age, students are increasingly digital natives, constantly connected to technology and more comfortable engaging through digital platforms than traditional in-person channels. In order to effectively support this generation, there is a need to communicate in a language they understand: technology. By embedding AI-powered tools within student support systems, institutions can offer timely, personalized and scalable assistance that meets students where they are, at any time of the day (Chaushi et al., 2024). While AI tools can significantly enhance the effectiveness of student support services, they require human oversight to ensure ethical use and relevance. Giannini (2024) emphasized that the goal is not

to replace human interaction but to complement it, striking a balance where human support guides AI integration to improve service delivery, reduce administrative burdens, enhance student outcomes and elevate the overall quality of the educational experience.

Public universities, particularly in developing nations like Nigeria, are under increasing pressure to improve the quality of student services amid surging enrollments, resource constraints and demands of digital transformation. In Rivers State, Nigeria, public universities such as University of Port Harcourt (Uniport), Rivers State University (RSU) and Ignatius Ajuru University of Education (IAUE) cater to a large, diverse and growing student population. These institutions, much like their counterparts across the globe, struggle with the challenge of delivering timely and comprehensive support services amid rising enrolment figures, infrastructural constraints and limited human resources. As student needs become increasingly complex,

AI-powered tools are emerging as a driving force, presenting an opportunity to augment existing support structures by delivering timely, personalized and efficient services. The administrative dimension of this challenge has been documented in the same university system. Wey-Amaewhule et al. (2024), in a correlational study of administrative officers in Rivers and Bayelsa States owned universities, found that administrative strategies such as quality assurance compliance, leadership style and digitalisation each bore a significant positive relationship with the actualisation of institutional goals, indicating that service delivery in these universities is shaped as much by administrative strategy as by resource levels.

Artificial intelligence (AI) refers to machines simulating human intelligence such as learning, problem-solving, perception and language understanding, which holds transformative potential for African higher education by improving learning outcomes, administrative efficiency and research capacity (Eltahir & Babiker, 2024; Mohammed-Shittu, 2025). It involves the development of algorithms and technologies capable of performing tasks traditionally associated with human cognition, such as problem solving, decision-making and language processing (Tuomi, 2018). AI encompasses a wide range of technologies, including machine learning, natural language processing and robotics, which enable machines to perform tasks that typically require human intelligence. As AI continues to evolve, its applications in various fields, including education, have garnered significant attention from researchers and practitioners alike. Evidence from Rivers State suggests, however, that attention has not yet translated into practice. Taylor et al. (2025), studying the entire population of adult educators in Rivers State-owned universities, found that staff were only moderately aware of artificial intelligence tools, that the extent of utilisation was low, and that respondents expressed concern about the ethical implications of adopting them. The gap between awareness and utilisation is an important starting point for any assessment of AI-enabled support services in this context.

Student support services (SSS) refer to the range of institutional resources and programmes offered to assist students in their academic, personal, administrative, social and career success within the learning environment (Mohammed & Wey-Amaewhule, 2026). These services which include academic advising, counseling, wellness programmes, administrative guidance, financial aid assistance, disability support, are designed to enhance students' persistence, academic success and overall learning experience (Shaheen et al., 2020; Elsayad, 2023). Effective support systems aim to foster retention by helping students overcome challenges ranging from financial constraints to mental health concerns, while equipping them with skills and resources needed for academic achievement.

Almada (2021) posited that the primary aim of integrating AI in student support is to assist large numbers of students proactively, by anticipating challenges and addressing them before they escalate to the point of negatively impacting academic performance. The integration of AI in student

support services can lead to more efficient and effective support mechanisms, by transforming how support is delivered, such as automating repetitive administrative tasks, predicting student needs and providing real-time academic guidance, AI improves efficiency and ensure that no student is left behind due to limitations of manual and staff-dependent systems. This administrative application of AI has also been examined locally. Nwuke and Yellowe (2025) investigated the utilisation of artificial intelligence in school supervision for effective administration in Rivers State and reported that AI-assisted monitoring improves the timeliness and consistency of administrative oversight, allowing routine tracking to be automated so that human attention can be directed to cases that require professional judgement.

The urgency of integrating AI tools becomes even more apparent when considering the mental health challenges facing students in today's higher institutions, largely belonging to Generation Z. With 24/7 exposure to social media and curated images of perfection and success, many students feel isolated or overwhelmed, coupled with the intense academic pressures characteristic of university life and inadequate institutional support. Schools which are ideally safe spaces for emotional and academic growth, often lack the capacity to respond adequately. Survey data revealed that 40% of Gen Z feel stressed or anxious all the time (Deloitte, as cited in Muhammad & Wayhu, 2024).

AI-powered mental health systems are intelligent applications that provide emotional and psychological support through chatbots, virtual counselling, mood tracking and self-help interventions. Examples include Wysa, Woebot, Youper, Replika, Tess. Systematic reviews indicate reductions in symptoms of anxiety and depression among students using AI-based chatbots, alongside improvements in emotional resilience, well-being and social connectedness (Reyes-Portillo et al., 2025). Recent studies, such as those by Sun et al. (2025), highlight an increasing reliance on digital mental health solutions, particularly among Generation Z students who are more inclined toward technology-mediated interactions. Mixed-methods evidence indicated that students engaged meaningfully with the tool, reporting that it provided accessible, confidential and scalable support outside traditional counselling services, it also revealed engagement and user satisfaction with 91.24% of respondents rating Wysa as beneficial in managing emotional well-being and stress. The researchers therefore recommended combining the tool with human-led support services in universities rather than replacement (Khan et al., 2025).

Predictive Analytics Tools use machine learning to analyze large datasets and predict student behaviours such as dropout risks, identify students showing signs of stress, depression, performance trends or support needs. Utibe et al. (2025) posit that predictive analytics allows administrative staff to identify "at-risk" students before they fail or drop out, enabling proactive interventions. Universities such as Georgia State University have successfully implemented predictive analytics system to identify at-risk students and provide targeted support, resulting in improved retention and graduation rates.

Green et al. (2025) added that predictive analytics can contribute to improved educational outcomes when embedded within a holistic framework that emphasizes equity, accountability and human-centered decision-making. Predictive analytics also assists academic advisors in monitoring student progress and allocating support resources effectively.

AI-powered Writing assistant tools such as ChatGPT, Grammarly, QuillBot are tools that assist students in developing academic writing, grammar and communication skills through real-time feedback and suggestions. AI writing assistants enhance academic literacy by functioning as “digital tutors,” particularly beneficial for students from diverse linguistic backgrounds (Fitra et al., 2025). Alkamel and Alwagieh (2024) emphasized the need for educators to adopt structured approaches to incorporating AI writing assistants into academic practice. This includes providing explicit instruction on ethical use, encouraging critical engagement with AI-generated feedback and positioning these tools as collaborative “writing partners.” AI writing support influences student engagement and learning strategies. Emerging research on AI literacy suggests that students’ ability to engage productively with generative AI affects their independent writing performance. Students who actively modify AI-generated text tend to produce higher-quality essays, indicating a link between AI usage and deep cognitive processing rather than passive dependency (Zhao et al., 2025). The capacity of both staff and students to engage productively with these tools is therefore itself a development question. LongJohn and LongJohn (2026), in a study of 381 teachers across the three senatorial districts of Rivers State, found that continuous professional learning and reflective practice significantly strengthened professional competence, and recommended that such programmes be institutionalised rather than left to individual initiative. Their argument is directly transferable to AI literacy, which is unlikely to develop evenly in the absence of structured institutional provision.

Statement of the Problem

Public universities in Nigeria continue to experience increasing student enrolment, inadequate counselling personnel, delayed academic support, limited early identification of students experiencing academic difficulties and insufficient personalized learning support. These challenges negatively affect students’ academic performance, psychological well-being, retention and overall educational experience. Although artificial intelligence technologies have demonstrated considerable potential in improving mental health support, predicting students at academic risk and enhancing academic writing, their application within Nigerian public universities remains relatively underdeveloped. Existing studies have largely focused on AI adoption in teaching and learning, with limited attention given to its role in strengthening comprehensive student support services. In addition, few studies have simultaneously examined stakeholders’ perceptions of multiple AI support tools within the Nigerian higher education context. Therefore, there

remains insufficient empirical evidence to guide educational administrators and policymakers on the adoption of AI-powered mental health systems, predictive analytics systems and AI-enabled writing assistant tools as integrated components of student support services in public universities. It is against this backdrop that this study was undertaken to address this gap, by examining the extent to which AI-enabled technologies contribute to improving student support services in public universities.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine artificial intelligence tools for enhancing academic and psychological student support services in public universities in Rivers State

Specifically, the study sought to:

1. assess the extent to which AI-powered mental health systems enhance student support services for students in public universities in Rivers State.
2. investigate the extent to which predictive analytics tools enhance support services for students in public universities in Rivers State.
3. assess the extent to which AI-powered writing assistants enhance support services for students in public universities in Rivers State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. To what extent does AI-powered mental health systems enhance support services for students in public universities in Rivers State?
2. To what extent does predictive analytics tools enhance support services for students in public universities in Rivers State?
3. To what extent does AI-powered writing assistants enhance support services for students in public universities in Rivers State?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

1. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of administrative staff and students on the extent to which AI-powered mental health systems enhance emotional support services in public universities in Rivers State.
2. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of administrative staff and students on the extent to which predictive analytics tools enhance academic support services in public universities in Rivers State.
3. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of administrative staff and students on the extent to which AI-powered writing assistants enhance student support services in public universities in Rivers State.

METHODOLOGY

The descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study was 92,836 students and administrative staff consisting of 92,570 students and 266 academic administrative staff in the three public universities in Rivers State. The sample of the study was 541, determined using Krejcie and Morgan sample size determination table. A multi-stage sampling technique was employed to select the respondents. The instrument for data collection in this study was a self-structured questionnaire titled 'Artificial Intelligence Tools for Enhancing Academic and Psychological Student Support Services in Public Universities Questionnaire' based on a 4-point modified Likert rating scale of Very High Extent (VHE), High Extent (HE), Low Extent (LE) and Very

Low Extent (VLE) weighted 4-1 respectively. The instrument was validated by three experts, one in the field of Educational Management and two in Measurement and Evaluation at Rivers State University, while the reliability was determined using the Cronbach Alpha statistics which yielded reliability indexes of 0.73, 0.87, and 0.82. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions while the null hypotheses were tested using the z-test at 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Research Question 1: To what extent does AI-powered mental health systems enhance emotional support services for students in public universities in Rivers State?

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of Difference between Administrative Staff and Students Perceptions of AI-powered Mental Health Systems for Enhancing Student Support Services in Public Universities

S/N	Items	Students n = 382		Admin. Staff n = 159		Remark
		M	SD	M	SD	
1	AI-powered mental health systems provide personalized responses that address students' emotional concerns.	3.03	0.65	2.92	0.73	HE
2	AI-powered mental health systems improve students' access to psychological support services outside regular counselling hours.	2.99	0.74	3.08	0.73	HE
3	AI-powered mental health systems helps students manage stress, anxiety or emotional distress effectively.	3.06	0.69	2.92	0.78	HE
4	The use of AI-powered mental health systems reduces the stigma associated with seeking emotional support, giving student sense of privacy.	3.11	0.76	2.94	0.80	HE
5	AI-powered mental health systems assists in identifying early signs of emotional distress among students.	3.09	0.72	3.00	0.66	HE
6	AI-powered mental health systems complement existing university counselling services effectively.	2.99	0.68	3.09	0.67	HE
7	AI-powered mental health systems significantly improve the effectiveness of emotional support services available to students in the university.	3.02	0.71	2.97	0.62	HE
	Grand Mean	3.04		2.99		HE

Source: Researcher's Excel Data output (2026)

The findings in Table 1 showed grand mean scores of students and administrative staff as 3.04 and 2.99 respectively, which both falls within the range 2.50-3.49, which is the criterion set for high extent, indicating that students and administrative staff hold positive perceptions regarding the potential of AI-

mental health systems in enhancing emotional and psychological well-being of students.

Research Question 2: To what extent does predictive analytics tools enhance support services for students in public universities in Rivers State?

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation of Difference between Administrative Staff and Students Perceptions of Predictive Analytics Tools for Enhancing Student Support Services in Public Universities

S/No	Items	Students n = 382		Admin. Staff n = 159		Remark
		M	SD	M	SD	
8	Predictive analytics tools help identify students at risk of academic under-performance or failure in public universities.	3.16	0.71	3.12	0.76	HE
9	Predictive analytics tools provide	3.00	0.67	3.04	0.66	HE

	personalized academic interventions or recommendations for students based on their learning patterns.					
10	Predictive analytics tools support academic advisors in tracking and supporting students' academic progress.	3.04	0.76	2.96	0.77	HE
11	Predictive analytics tools help predict students' success in specific courses or programmes, guiding academic planning.	3.08	0.73	2.96	0.69	HE
12	Predictive analytics tools enhance the ability of university staff to proactively address students' academic needs before issues become critical.	3.03	0.71	3.08	0.77	HE
13	Predictive analytics tools improve the targeting of academic resources and support services to students who need them the most.	2.99	0.69	2.91	0.63	HE
14	Predictive analytics tools provide insights that enable universities to make data-driven decisions to enhance student learning outcomes.	3.16	0.64	3.03	0.67	HE
Grand Mean		3.07		3.01		HE

Source: Researcher's Excel Data output (2026)

The findings in Table 2 indicated that students had a grand mean score of 3.07, while administrative staff had grand mean score of 3.01. The grand mean scores are within the high extent range, suggesting that predictive analytics systems is perceived as effective in identifying and supporting at-risk

students, providing data-driven insights to enhance support services.

Research Question 3: To what extent does AI-powered writing assistants enhance support services for students in public universities in Rivers State?

Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation of Difference between Administrative Staff and Students Perceptions of AI-powered Writing Assistants for Enhancing Student Support Services in Public Universities

S/No	Items	Students n = 382		Admin. Staff n = 159		Remark
		M	SD	M	SD	
15	AI-powered writing assistants help students improve the clarity and organization of their academic writing.	3.13	0.71	3.01	0.65	HE
16	AI-powered writing assistants support students in correcting grammatical, spelling and punctuation errors in academic work.	3.16	0.73	2.93	0.80	HE
17	AI-powered writing assistants assist students in understanding academic writing standards and referencing styles.	2.95	0.64	2.78	0.80	HE
18	AI-powered writing assistants reduce students' reliance on manual writing support from lecturers or support staff.	2.88	0.72	2.95	0.74	HE
19	AI-powered writing assistants enhance students' confidence in completing assignments, projects and research work.	2.89	0.65	2.91	0.59	HE
20	AI-powered writing assistants provide timely feedback that supports students' academic writing development.	2.98	0.71	2.94	0.68	HE

21	AI-powered writing assistants improve students' overall satisfaction with academic support services in the university.	3.08	0.77	2.88	0.74	HE
Grand Mean		3.01		2.91		HE

Source: Researcher's Excel Data output (2026)

The results in Table 3 showed that students had a mean score of 3.01, while administrative staff had a mean score of 2.91, these grand mean scores fall within the High Extent range. This indicates that AI-enabled writing assistant tools are perceived as valuable for improving writing quality by both groups despite the slight numerical difference.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of administrative staff and students on the extent to which AI-powered mental health systems enhance emotional support services for students in public universities in Rivers State.

Table 4: z-test Analysis on the Difference between Staff and Students' Perceptions on the Extent to which AI-powered Mental Health Systems enhance Support Services in Public Universities in Rivers State

Respondents	N	M	SD	df	p	z-cal	z-crit	Decision
Students	382	3.04	0.48	539	0.135	1.49	±1.96	Failed to reject Not Significant
Staff	159	2.99	0.35					

Source: Researcher's Excel Data Output (2026)

The results on Table 4 indicated Students with $M = 3.04$, $SD = 0.48$ and administrative staff with $M = 2.99$, $SD = 0.35$, $df = 539$, the calculated z value =1.49 and is within the range of z-critical value of ± 1.96 . The results revealed no significant difference in students' and administrative staff's perceptions of the extent to which AI-powered mental health support can enhance support services. Thus, the null hypothesis is not rejected, an indication that students and staff share

comparable views regarding the potential of AI-powered mental health systems in enhancing emotional support services.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of administrative staff and students on the extent to which predictive analytics tools enhance academic support services for students in public universities in Rivers State.

Table 5: z-test Analysis on the Difference between Staff and Students' Perceptions on the Extent to which Predictive Analytics Tools enhance Support Services in Public Universities in Rivers State

Respondents	N	M	SD	df	p	z-cal	z-crit	Decision
Students	382	3.07	0.46	539	0.251	1.15	±1.96	Failed to reject Not Significant
Staff	159	3.01	0.49					

Source: Researcher's Excel Data Output (2026)

The results on Table 5 revealed students with $M = 3.07$, $SD = 0.46$ and administrative staff with $M = 3.01$, $SD = 0.49$, $df = 539$, calculated z- value of 1.15 is within the range of z-critical value of ± 1.96 . The results revealed no significant difference in students' and administrative staff's perceptions. Thus, the null hypothesis is not rejected, an indication that students and

staff share similar views regarding the potential of predictive analytics in enhancing administrative support services.

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of administrative staff and students on the extent to which AI-powered writing assistants enhance student support services in public universities in Rivers State.

Table 6: z-test Analysis on the Difference between Staff and Students' Perceptions on the Extent to which AI-powered Writing Assistants enhance Support Services in Public Universities in Rivers State

Respondents	N	Mean	SD	df	p	z-cal	z-crit	Decision
Students	382	3.01	0.49	539	0.015	2.41	±1.96	Reject Significant
Staff	159	2.91	0.40					

Source: Researcher's Excel Data Output (2026)

The results on Table 6 showed students with $M = 3.01$, $SD = 0.49$ and administrative staff with $M = 2.91$, $SD = 0.40$, $df = 539$, z-calculated value of 2.41 is outside the range of z-critical value of ± 1.96 . Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected,

an indication that students and staff differed in views regarding the potential of AI-powered writing assistants tools in enhancing student support services.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings from research question 1 on Table 1 revealed students' and staff Mean both within the high extent range; thus, suggesting that students and administrative staff perceive that adopting AI-powered mental health systems could help students manage stress, anxiety, and emotional distress, while simultaneously removing the stigma often associated with seeking help from human counsellors, thereby creating a more accessible and less intimidating support environment. This aligns with Khan et al. (2025), who found that AI-powered mental health systems can provide cost-effective, confidential, and scalable emotional support for students, thereby strengthening institutional support structures. Similarly, Sun et al. (2025) corroborate these findings by stating that the use of AI-based mental health tools was positively associated with psychological well-being both directly and indirectly through enhanced emotional self-efficacy and perceived autonomy, thereby reinforcing the value of such tools in promoting student resilience. The corresponding hypothesis 1 on Table 4 revealed a z-calculated value of 1.49 which falls within the z-critical value of ± 1.96 , therefore, the null hypothesis is not rejected, thereby indicating statistical agreement between both groups. Consequently, the lack of significant difference in the z-test results suggests that both students and administrative staff similarly recognize the relative advantage of these tools in providing low-barrier, 24/7 assistance that ultimately enhances psychological and emotional support services. These findings align with Reyes-Portillo et al. (2025), who argued that AI-driven psychological tools provide essential immediate triage in settings where human counselors are overstretched, thus reinforcing their practical relevance. In addition, Khan et al. (2025) noted that students have positive views of AI-based mental health systems due to their accessibility and user-friendly interface, thereby supporting students from diverse backgrounds and needs. Therefore, integrating AI-powered mental health systems in public universities in Rivers State could effectively mitigate challenges associated with human-dependent service systems, while also improving student satisfaction and institutional responsiveness, thereby making them a viable and impactful component of modern student support services.

The results from research question 2 on Table 2 revealed students' and staff Mean which both fall within the high extent range; thus, indicating that both students and administrative staff share similar perceptions regarding predictive analytics systems. This further suggests that predictive analytics is perceived as a valuable tool for identifying at-risk students, personalizing academic interventions, and supporting data-driven decision-making aimed at improving student outcomes. This finding agrees with Green et al. (2025) who found that predictive analytics systems significantly enhance learning outcomes, particularly when used as collaborative tools that support early intervention, strategic planning, and reflective dialogue among educators. Similarly, Utibe et al. (2025) corroborate these findings by reporting that predictive models successfully identified 91.8% of students who passed and 82.9% who

failed, thereby demonstrating their strong predictive capability and usefulness in improving decision-making processes. The corresponding hypothesis 2 on Table 5 revealed a z-calculated value of 1.147 which falls within the z-critical value of ± 1.96 , therefore, the null hypothesis is not rejected, indicating no significant difference in the perceptions of students and administrative staff. Consequently, the lack of significant difference suggests that both groups recognize the relative advantage of predictive analytics systems in enhancing student retention and support through timely and data-informed interventions. These findings align with Utibe et al. (2025) who noted that staff perceive predictive analytics as a powerful tool for identifying learning risks, thereby enabling proactive rather than reactive student support. The finding is further reinforced by Nwuke and Yellowe (2025), who established in the Rivers State context that AI-assisted monitoring strengthens administrative oversight by making it timelier and more consistent. Read alongside the present result, this suggests that the value staff attach to predictive analytics rests on its capacity to convert routine institutional data into early administrative action rather than on the sophistication of the technology itself.

The findings from research question 3 on Table 3 revealed students' and staff Mean which both lie within the high extent range; thus, indicating that both students and administrative staff recognize the potential of AI-enabled writing assistant tools as effective means of enhancing academic writing to a high extent, while also revealing subtle differences in the intensity of their perceptions. This finding aligns with Alkamel and Alwagieh (2024), who noted that students hold positive perceptions toward AI writing tools due to improvements in writing fluency, grammatical accuracy, and overall quality. The corresponding hypothesis 3 on Table 6 revealed a z-calculated value of 2.41 which exceeds the z-critical value of ± 1.96 , therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected, indicating a significant difference between students' and staff perceptions. This significant difference suggests that although both groups rated the tools to a high extent, they do not share the same level of confidence in their implications for academic practice, students perceive their effectiveness more strongly than staff, thereby reflecting a divergence in perspectives likely influenced by differences in usage patterns and roles. This finding aligns with Zhao et al. (2025), who reported that students benefit significantly from AI writing tools, particularly those with learning challenges, while educators remain cautious about ethical implications and misuse. Furthermore, Fitra et al. (2025) observed that while digital writing tools improve student self-efficacy, faculty members often remain concerned about the boundary between legitimate assistance and automated plagiarism. This finding implies that universities should not only integrate AI writing tools into student support services but also provide structured AI literacy programmes that guide students on ethical and effective usage, while equipping staff with strategies to redesign assessments that minimize misuse. The divergence between the two groups is further illuminated by Taylor et al. (2025), who reported that academic staff in Rivers State-owned universities were only moderately aware of artificial

intelligence tools and utilised them to a low extent, while remaining concerned about the ethical questions involved. Their finding offers a plausible explanation for the more cautious staff ratings recorded here, since limited direct experience of a tool tends to produce more guarded judgements about it. This reading also strengthens the case made by LongJohn and LongJohn (2026) for institutionalised professional learning, on the argument that the perception gap between staff and students is more likely to close through structured capacity development than through exposure alone.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that AI-powered mental health systems, predictive analytics systems and AI-enabled writing assistant tools are perceived to enhance student support services to a high extent in public universities in Rivers State. The findings demonstrate that these technologies have considerable potential to strengthen emotional support, improve early identification of academically vulnerable students and enhance academic writing support.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. University management should integrate AI-powered mental health systems and predictive analytics systems into institutional counselling services to improve students' emotional well-being, access to psychological support and facilitate early identification of academically at-risk students.
2. Government and university governing councils should increase investment in digital infrastructure, including reliable internet access, data management systems and AI platforms necessary for sustainable AI implementation within student support services.

University management should organize regular training programmes for both staff and students to enhance AI literacy, ensuring that users can effectively and responsively utilize AI tools for academic and administrative purposes.

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