ISSN: 3641 - 3752
Volume 12, Number 2, 2026
Contemporary Journal of Physical Sciences

RENEWABLE ENERGY OPTIMIZATION THROUGH AI AND IOT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract — Nigeria's solar energy sector has experienced significant growth following government policy commitments under the National Energy Transition Plan (NETP) 2022, yet the full potential of deployed solar assets remains unrealized due to suboptimal energy management practices. Conventional solar charge controllers and energy management systems operate on fixed rule-based logic incapable of adapting to the dynamic variability of solar irradiance, load demand patterns, and battery state conditions in real-world Nigerian deployment environments. This paper reviews and evaluates the application of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Internet of Things (IoT) technologies for solar energy optimization in Nigeria, examining three core application domains: AI -driven maximum power point tracking (MPPT), IoT-enabled remote monitoring and predictive maintenance, and machine learning-based energy demand forecasting. Through systematic review of 58 peer-reviewed studies (2018–2025) and analysis of deployment data from six solar installations in Delta, Edo, and Lagos States, the study demonstrates that AI-enhanced MPPT improves energy harvest by 8.3–14.7% over conventional perturb-and-observe algorithms, IoT-based predictive maintenance reduces unplanned downtime by 34–42%, and machine learning demand forecasting reduces battery cycling by 18–26%. The paper proposes a practical implementation framework for integrating these technologies into existing Nigerian solar deployments at marginal additional cost, and identifies the skills development requirements for Nigerian engineering graduates to drive this optimization agenda.

Keywords: Solar energy optimization, AI, IoT, MPPT, predictive maintenance, demand forecasting, Nigeria, renewable energy, NETP

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria's commitment to solar energy as a cornerstone of its National Energy Transition Plan (NETP) 2022 has driven significant growth in solar photovoltaic deployment across residential, commercial, and institutional sectors. The Rural Electrification Agency (REA) has commissioned over 1,000 mini-grids and off-grid solar systems since 2017, and private sector investment in distributed solar has accelerated sharply with the reduction in PV module costs below USD 0.20 per watt (IEA, 2024). However, a persistent gap exists between the theoretical energy generation potential of installed solar systems and their actual operational performance — a gap attributable primarily to suboptimal energy management rather than technological limitations.

The conventional Perturb-and-Observe (P&O) Maximum Power Point Tracking algorithm — the standard control approach in most affordable charge controllers available in the Nigerian market — achieves only 85–92% of theoretical maximum energy extraction efficiency under dynamic irradiance conditions (Abdalla et al., 2021). Battery management based on fixed state-of-charge thresholds leads to premature battery degradation, unnecessary diesel generator activation, and preventable energy curtailment. The absence of predictive maintenance systems means that panel soiling, shading, and cell degradation go undetected until visible performance loss triggers manual intervention — typically months after the fault onset.

Artificial Intelligence and IoT technologies offer targeted, proven solutions to each of these

inefficiencies. AI-based MPPT algorithms — including Fuzzy Logic Control, Neural Networks, and Reinforcement Learning — have been shown to outperform conventional P&O across a range of irradiance conditions. IoT sensor networks enable continuous performance monitoring and early fault detection. Machine learning demand forecasting enables proactive battery management that extends asset life and reduces operational costs.

This paper provides a comprehensive review of these technologies in the context of Nigerian solar deployments, analyses performance data from six real installations, and proposes a practical implementation framework accessible to Nigerian engineering practitioners — including those at Delta State Polytechnic and comparable institutions — without requiring specialised AI expertise beyond what is achievable through existing engineering curricula.

LITERATURE REVIEW

AI-Driven Maximum Power Point Tracking

Maximum Power Point Tracking (MPPT) is the process of continuously adjusting the solar PV system's operating point to extract the maximum available power from panels under varying irradiance, temperature, and shading conditions. The performance of MPPT algorithms is typically measured by tracking efficiency — the ratio of actual extracted power to maximum available power over a given period. Conventional algorithms including Perturb-and-Observe (P&O) and Incremental Conductance (INC) achieve tracking efficiencies of 85–92% under stable irradiance but degrade significantly under rapidly changing conditions (Abdalla et al., 2021).

AI-based MPPT algorithms have consistently demonstrated superior performance. Fuzzy Logic Control (FLC)-based MPPT, reviewed by Seyedmahmoudian et al. (2023) across 32 studies, achieved average tracking efficiencies of 96.4% — a 6.4 percentage point improvement over P&O. Neural Network-based MPPT demonstrated even stronger performance under partial shading conditions, where conventional algorithms converge to local rather than global maxima, losing 15–30% of available power (Kumar et al., 2022). Deep Reinforcement Learning (DRL)-based MPPT, an emerging approach reviewed by Hassan et al. (2024), has demonstrated tracking efficiencies exceeding 98% by continuously learning from system dynamics without requiring explicit mathematical modelling of the PV system.

IoT-Enabled Remote Monitoring and Predictive Maintenance

IoT-based remote monitoring of solar PV systems involves the continuous measurement and cloud transmission of key performance indicators including voltage, current, power output, irradiance (via pyranometer or irradiance sensor), panel temperature, and inverter operating parameters. By comparing actual performance against expected performance under measured irradiance conditions, IoT monitoring systems can detect faults including soiling, shading, cell degradation, bypass diode failure, and inverter faults at an early stage — before significant energy losses accumulate.

Bosman et al. (2020) documented that undetected PV system faults in Sub-Saharan African deployments resulted in average energy losses of 12–18% over a 12-month period, with faults remaining undetected for an average of 4.7 months due to the absence of monitoring infrastructure. IoT-based monitoring reduced average fault detection time to 2.3 days in their implementation, translating to energy loss reductions of 68%. In the Nigerian context, Nwosu and Adeyemi (2023) implemented a GSM-based solar monitoring system for six mini-grids in rural Niger State, documenting similar performance improvements and confirming the viability of IoT monitoring in low-connectivity environments through GSM data transmission.

Machine Learning for Energy Demand Forecasting

Accurate forecasting of energy demand is a critical enabler of intelligent battery management in solar-battery systems. When the energy management system can anticipate demand peaks and valleys 24–48 hours in advance, it can proactively charge batteries during

periods of surplus generation, avoid deep discharge events that accelerate battery degradation, and schedule diesel generator operation during off-peak tariff periods. Machine learning models — particularly Long Short-Term Memory (LSTM) neural networks and Gradient Boosting algorithms — have demonstrated demand forecasting accuracy of 88–94% for 24-hour horizons in comparable developing country contexts (Ibrahim et al., 2023).

Skills Gap for AI-Solar Engineering in Nigeria

A critical enabling factor for widespread AI and IoT-based solar optimization is the availability of engineering graduates with relevant skills. Okafor et al. (2024) surveyed 45 Nigerian polytechnic and university engineering departments, finding that only 12% included any IoT programming content in their curricula, and fewer than 5% covered AI or machine learning applications to energy systems. This skills gap represents both a constraint on adoption and an opportunity for polytechnics — including Delta State Polytechnic — to differentiate their programmes and produce graduates with directly relevant, high-demand competencies.

METHODOLOGY

Systematic Literature Review

A systematic literature review was conducted covering 58 peer-reviewed studies published between 2018 and 2025, identified through searches of Scopus, IEEE Xplore, and Google Scholar using Boolean combinations of terms including 'MPPT optimisation,' 'AI solar energy,' 'IoT photovoltaic monitoring,' 'demand forecasting solar,' and 'Nigeria renewable energy.' Studies were screened for: (i) application of AI or IoT to solar energy performance optimization; (ii) quantitative performance metrics reported; and (iii) deployment in Sub-Saharan African or comparable developing economy contexts.

Field Data Collection

Operational performance data were collected from six solar installations in Delta, Edo, and Lagos States over a 12-month period (January–December 2024). Installations ranged from 5 kW residential systems to 100 kW commercial systems. Key performance indicators including daily energy yield, capacity factor, performance ratio, and downtime events were recorded. Three installations had existing IoT monitoring (using ESP32-based data loggers with cloud upload); three relied on manual periodic inspection. This comparative configuration enabled direct assessment of the performance differential attributable to IoT monitoring.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Literature Review: Performance Gains from AI-IoT Technologies

Table 1: Performance Gains from AI and IoT Technologies in Solar Systems — Literature Summary

Technology	Performance Metric	Conventional Baseline	AI/IoT Performance	Improvement	No. of Studies
AI-based MPPT (Fuzzy Logic)	Tracking efficiency (%)	85–92%	93–97%	+8.3 pp avg	18
AI-based MPPT (Neural Network)	Partial shading loss reduction	15–30% loss	3–8% loss	−18.3 pp loss	14
DRL-based MPPT	Overall tracking efficiency	88–92%	97–99%	+9.4 pp avg	8
IoT predictive	Unplanned	8–15%/year	4–9%/year	−38% avg	12

Technology	Performance Metric	Conventional Baseline	AI/IoT Performance	Improvement	No. of Studies
maintenance	downtime (%)				
ML demand forecasting	24-hr forecast accuracy	70–80% (naive)	88–94%	+16 pp avg	6

Field Data: IoT-Monitored vs. Manually Inspected Installations

Table 2: 12-Month Performance Comparison — IoT-Monitored vs. Manual Inspection

Performance Indicator	IoT-Monitored Sites (n=3)	Manual Inspection Sites (n=3)	Differential
Average daily energy yield (kWh/kWp)	4.82	4.23	+14.0%
Average performance ratio (%)	81.4%	71.2%	+10.2 pp
Average fault detection time (days)	2.1	134.6	−98.4%
Unplanned downtime events/year	1.3	4.7	−72.3%
Estimated annual energy loss from faults (%)	4.8%	16.3%	−11.5 pp
Maintenance visits required/year	2.1	6.4	−67.2%

DISCUSSION

The systematic review and field data together make a compelling case for the integration of AI and IoT technologies into Nigerian solar energy deployments. The 14.0% improvement in daily energy yield between IoT-monitored and manually inspected installations in the field study — consistent with the 12–18% loss figure documented by Bosman et al. (2020) for unmonitored Sub-Saharan African systems — confirms that performance monitoring alone, independent of any AI control optimization, delivers substantial value.

For the Nigerian context specifically, the most immediately deployable and highest-return technology is IoT-based monitoring and fault detection. Unlike AI-based MPPT — which requires replacement or modification of charge controllers — IoT monitoring can be retrofitted to existing installations using low-cost ESP32 data loggers at a per-installation hardware cost of approximately ₦45,000–₦75,000. This represents a return on investment period of less than 12 months through energy loss prevention alone, based on the performance differentials documented in the field study.

The skills development dimension of this finding is directly relevant to the conference theme. Delta State Polytechnic and comparable engineering institutions are uniquely positioned to bridge the 95% curriculum gap documented by Okafor et al. (2024) by introducing IoT-solar monitoring as a practical laboratory project within existing electrical and mechanical engineering programmes. The hardware cost of a teaching installation (approximately ₦75,000) is within reach of departmental laboratory budgets, and the programming skills required — C/C++ embedded systems development and basic cloud platform integration — align with existing competencies in computing and electronics curricula.

CONCLUSION

This paper has demonstrated through systematic literature review and field data analysis

that AI and IoT technologies offer substantial, achievable, and economically justified performance improvements for solar energy systems in Nigeria. IoT-based monitoring delivers 14% improvement in energy yield and 72% reduction in unplanned downtime relative to manual inspection regimes. AI-based MPPT offers an additional 8–14% energy harvest improvement, particularly valuable under the dynamic irradiance and partial shading conditions common in Nigerian environments.

Three priority recommendations are made. First, the REA and development partners should mandate IoT monitoring as a standard requirement for all new mini-grid and off-grid solar deployments under public funding programmes. Second, engineering curricula at Nigerian polytechnics should be updated to include IoT-solar monitoring as a core laboratory competency, equipping graduates with immediately marketable skills for Nigeria's growing solar operations and maintenance sector. Third, a national IoT solar performance database should be established — aggregating anonymised performance data from monitored installations — to support benchmarking, research, and evidence-based policy development.

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