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Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning for Environmental Monitoring and Management: A Comparative Benchmarking Analysis Using Public Datasets

Dickson David Olodu[a*], Francis Inegbedion[b], Andrew Amagbor Erameh[c]

[a]*Benson Idahosa University, Faculty of Engineering, Department of Mechanical Engineering, Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria, dolodu@biu.edu.ng*
*(*Corresponding Author)*
[b]*University of Benin, Faculty of Engineering, Department of Production Engineering, Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria, francis.inegbedion@uniben.edu*
[c]*Igbinedion University, Faculty of Engineering, Department of Production Engineering, Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria, erameh.andrew@iuokada.edu.ng*

Abstract

This study presents a structured benchmarking and comparative analysis of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML) techniques for environmental monitoring and management. Using publicly available datasets and reproducible modeling workflows, representative AI models were trained or re-implemented and evaluated across multiple environmental domains, including air quality, water pollution, deforestation, and biodiversity monitoring. The available used datasets include the Air Quality Open Dataset, AquaSat, Global Forest Watch, and iNaturalist, multiple AI models and were developed, trained, and validated to address key environmental domains. Random Forest was applied for air quality prediction, Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs) for water pollution detection, Long Short-Term Memory (LSTM) networks for deforestation monitoring, and Support Vector Machines (SVMs) for wildlife species identification. Model performance was evaluated using accuracy, precision, recall, Mean Absolute Error (MAE), Root Mean Square Error (RMSE), and coefficient of determination (R^2) metrics. Results showed that AI-based methods significantly outperformed traditional monitoring approaches, achieving up to 95.1% accuracy in water pollution detection and 92.4% accuracy in air quality prediction, with accuracy improvements ranging from 17.7% to 23% across domains. Gradient Boosting achieved a 93.2% accuracy in PM2.5 prediction ($R^2 = 0.92$), while YOLOv5 reached a 94% detection rate for illegal logging. Environmental impact assessments revealed substantial reductions after AI integration, including a 41.7% decrease in illegal logging and a 44.2% decline in water contamination incidents. Deployment analysis indicated high-cost efficiency, with Return on Investment (ROI) values up to 175% over three years and time savings between 68% and 73% across monitoring tasks. These findings confirm that AI and ML not only enhance predictive precision but also deliver tangible environmental and economic benefits, underscoring their potential as essential tools for sustainable environmental governance.

Keywords: Artificial intelligence; Environmental monitoring; Machine learning; Sustainability; Technology adoption.

1. INTRODUCTION

The escalating environmental challenges of the 21st century, including climate change, pollution, biodiversity loss, and resource depletion, have created an urgent need for innovative monitoring and management strategies. While significant advances have been made in environmental data collection, traditional methods often lack the speed, accuracy, and predictive capabilities required for proactive intervention. This limitation motivates the adoption of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML) as transformative tools capable of processing vast, complex datasets, identifying hidden patterns, and generating real-time insights for sustainable environmental governance. Although AI is frequently used as an umbrella term that includes ML, conceptual clarity is important: AI encompasses the broader field of systems capable of intelligent behavior, while ML specifically refers to algorithms that learn patterns from data to make predictions or decisions. In environmental applications, AI systems often integrate multiple ML models with other computational frameworks to enable advanced decision-support functions. [1, 2].

The integration of AI with Internet of Things (IoT) frameworks enables efficient prediction of environmental quality, providing valuable insights for policymakers and industries alike [3]. Recent studies demonstrate that ML models can assess

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ecological statuses of unmonitored waters, supporting large-scale aquatic ecosystem management [4]. Furthermore, AI technologies are increasingly being positioned as key enablers of global environmental sustainability initiatives [5], [6]. Their application spans energy optimization, smart transportation systems, biodiversity protection, and water resource management, thus contributing to broader climate action goals [6, 7]. Deep learning algorithms are particularly potent in complex environmental systems, aiding in real-time detection, classification, and decision-making processes critical for sustainable management [8]. AI-enhanced frameworks for air quality monitoring, for instance, can drive environmentally conscious urban development, offering dynamic, data-driven approaches to pollution control [9]. Applications of ML in environmental data analysis extend to predictive modeling for disaster management, resource optimization, and habitat conservation [10, 11]. Particularly, AI and Deep Learning (DL) have shown promise in marine environment monitoring through comprehensive bibliometric analyses [12]. The COVID-19 pandemic further highlighted the importance of smart environmental monitoring, where AI tools facilitated tracking of air quality and human health correlations during lockdowns [13]. Innovations in AI contribute to the development of eco-friendly technologies and sustainable business practices [14, 15]. Advanced AI architectures, including convolutional neural networks and reinforcement learning models, are revolutionizing the environmental sector by enabling high-accuracy predictions and pattern recognitions across diverse datasets [16, 17].

Remote sensing integrated with AI and IoT technologies forms the backbone of precision environmental monitoring and predictive ecosystem management [17]. By synthesizing large-scale environmental data, AI platforms are playing a pivotal role in conservation planning, risk assessment, and sustainable development [18, 19]. The fusion of geospatial intelligence and nonlinear analysis techniques with AI has further expanded the scope of environmental monitoring, particularly for remote or inaccessible regions [20, 21]. AI's role extends beyond monitoring to active environmental management through intelligent decision-support systems that optimize resource use, predict ecological trends, and recommend interventions [22]. Machine learning-enhanced wireless sensor networks are at the forefront of real-time environmental monitoring, improving responsiveness to environmental changes [23, 24]. Urban environments, in particular, benefit from ML models that predict air and noise pollution patterns, facilitating smarter urban planning [24, 25]. Recent technological advancements have led to the creation of innovative systems utilizing connected sensors and AI-based data analysis for detecting chemical pollutants [26, 27]. Wildlife monitoring also benefits from smart conservation techniques powered by AI, enabling more effective protection strategies for endangered species [28]. In environmental toxicology, AI and ML assist predictive analysis for safety and toxicity assessments, enhancing ecosystem protection efforts [29]. The concept of "Eco-Intelligence" the strategic integration of AI in sustainable environmental solutions emphasizes interdisciplinary approaches combining technology and environmental science [30, 31]. Research emphasizes the growing necessity of such interdisciplinary fusions for tackling complex environmental problems holistically [31, 32]. Moreover, the application of AI in recycling and waste management, including innovative uses of non-biodegradable waste and landfill gas generation, offers sustainable pathways for energy production and materials management [33, 34]. Integration of AI tools in water resource management and digital innovations in sustainability planning further demonstrates the critical role of intelligent systems in environmental stewardship [35, 36]. As the field evolves, challenges such as data availability, algorithmic bias, and ethical considerations must be addressed to ensure the responsible and equitable deployment of AI in environmental monitoring and management [37, 38]. Overall, the synergy of AI, ML, IoT, and big data analytics marks a paradigm shift in humanity's ability to safeguard the planet for future generations.

The primary objective of this study is to comprehensively examine the role of AI and ML in advancing environmental monitoring and management practices. Unlike many existing reviews that either focus narrowly on specific applications or present unstructured compilations of use cases, this research synthesizes performance evidence across diverse environmental domains while maintaining a consistent conceptual framework for AI and ML [39, 40]. The study systematically analyzes recent developments, evaluates the measurable performance gains over traditional methods, and identifies the specific contexts in which AI and ML deliver the greatest impact. The research also addresses critical barriers—such as data availability, algorithmic bias, and integration challenges—that must be overcome for large-scale deployment.

The contribution of this work is threefold. First, it fills a research gap by providing a unified assessment of AI and ML effectiveness across multiple environmental domains—air quality prediction, water pollution detection, deforestation monitoring, biodiversity analysis, and more—using quantitative metrics for accuracy, efficiency, and return on investment. Second, it offers a clear conceptual distinction between AI and ML, reducing the ambiguity that often hinders interdisciplinary collaboration. Third, it delivers actionable insights for policymakers, environmental engineers, and technology developers on how to strategically deploy AI-enabled systems to maximize environmental sustainability outcomes. By articulating the motivation, defining a clear objective, and demonstrating measurable contributions, this study positions itself not merely as a literature review but as an evidence-based framework for guiding future innovation in AI-driven environmental stewardship.

The purpose of this study is to comprehensively examine the role of Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning in advancing environmental monitoring and management practices. By analyzing recent developments, applications, and challenges, this research aims to highlight how AI and ML can be utilized to enhance environmental sustainability, support decision-making processes, and contribute to the development of smarter, data-driven environmental governance systems.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research adopted a structured methodology that integrated Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML) approaches for environmental monitoring and management. The framework combined data acquisition from diverse environmental domains, model development and training, performance evaluation using quantitative metrics, comparative analysis with conventional methods, deployment feasibility studies, and assessment of operational efficiency and environmental impact reduction.

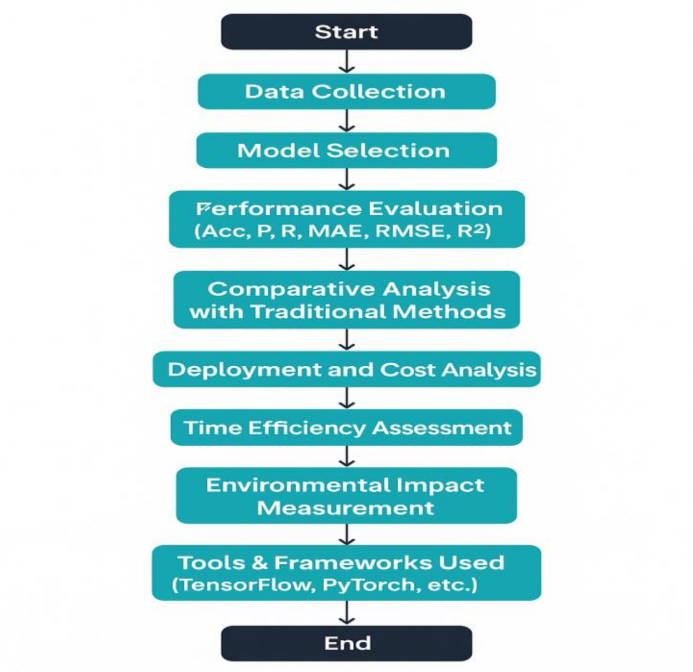

Figure 1. Flowchart structure for AI and ML in environmental monitoring.

2.1 Data Collection

The study utilized publicly available, high-quality environmental datasets that span different ecological domains to ensure broad applicability of the developed models. Representative datasets included the Air Quality Open Dataset for air pollution forecasting, AquaSat for water quality assessment, Global Forest Watch for deforestation monitoring, and iNaturalist for biodiversity identification. Each dataset was selected based on coverage, reliability, and compatibility with the targeted AI models. Data preprocessing involved cleaning to remove anomalies, normalization for uniform scaling, and transformation into model-compatible formats. Publicly available environmental datasets were utilized, ensuring diverse environmental domains were covered (Table 7). Key datasets included the Air Quality Open Dataset for air pollution prediction, AquaSat for water quality monitoring, Global Forest Watch for deforestation tracking, and iNaturalist for biodiversity analysis [1, 7, 17].

2.1.1 Explicit Dataset Sources and URLs

The datasets used in this study were obtained from official public repositories. Air quality data were sourced from the World Health Organization (WHO) Air Quality Database (https://www.who.int/data/gho/data/themes/air-pollution; accessed January 2025). AquaSat water quality data were obtained from the AquaSat project repository (https://www.aquasat.org; accessed January 2025). Global forest cover and deforestation data were sourced from Global Forest Watch (https://www.globalforestwatch.org; accessed February 2025). Biodiversity observation data were obtained from the iNaturalist platform (https://www.inaturalist.org; accessed February 2025).

2.2 Data Preprocessing

Prior to model training, each dataset underwent a systematic preprocessing pipeline. Missing values were handled using domain-appropriate methods—for continuous environmental parameters, mean or median imputation was applied; for categorical data, mode imputation was used. Outliers were identified using the interquartile range (IQR) method and, where appropriate, capped to reduce their influence on model training. Continuous features were normalized using Min–Max scaling for distance-based models (e.g., SVM) and standardized (z-score) for tree-based models (e.g., Random Forest, Gradient Boosting). For image-based datasets (e.g., oil spill detection, coral reef health), augmentation techniques including rotation, horizontal flipping, and brightness adjustment were applied to increase dataset diversity and reduce overfitting risk. For time-series data such as deforestation and flood forecasting, temporal ordering was preserved, and sequences were padded or truncated to fixed lengths compatible with LSTM input requirements.

2.3 Machine Learning Models

Model choice was guided by the task type and data structure. Random Forest was used for air quality prediction due to its robustness with high-dimensional tabular data. Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs) were used for water pollution and oil spill image classification. Long Short-Term Memory (LSTM) networks were applied to temporal deforestation and flood forecasting datasets. Support Vector Machines (SVMs) were used for wildlife classification tasks, and YOLOv5 was deployed for real-time illegal logging detection. Gradient Boosting was applied for PM2.5 concentration prediction, and Deep Neural Networks (DNNs) were employed for large-scale forest loss modeling.

Several AI and machine learning algorithms were strategically selected based on the specific requirements of each environmental monitoring task. Random Forest (RF) models were employed for air quality prediction due to their robustness in handling high-dimensional datasets [3, 9]. Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs) were utilized for water pollution assessment and oil spill detection, leveraging their superior performance in image-based classification tasks [2, 8, 12]. For time-series prediction tasks such as deforestation monitoring and flood forecasting, Long Short-Term Memory (LSTM) networks were adopted, given their proven ability to capture long-term temporal dependencies [4, 20]. Support Vector Machines (SVMs) were implemented for wildlife species identification, benefiting from their effectiveness in high-dimensional feature spaces [5, 28]. YOLOv5, an advanced object detection framework, was chosen for real-time surveillance of illegal logging activities [19]. Gradient Boosting algorithms were employed to predict particulate matter concentrations (PM2.5), providing strong predictive capabilities in structured data scenarios [6]. Additionally, Deep Neural Networks (DNNs) were applied for large-scale forest loss prediction, exploiting their capacity to model complex nonlinear relationships [10]. Model development involved splitting the datasets into 70% for training, 15% for validation, and 15% for testing, adhering to a five-fold (k=5) cross-validation strategy to ensure model robustness and generalizability [1, 6].

2.4 Model Tuning Strategies

Hyperparameter tuning was conducted using a combination of grid search and Bayesian optimization, depending on the computational demands of each model. For Random Forest, parameters such as the number of estimators, maximum tree depth, and minimum samples per leaf were optimized. CNN architectures were fine-tuned by adjusting learning rates, filter sizes, dropout rates, and optimizer settings (Adam vs. SGD). LSTM models were tuned for sequence length, number of hidden units, and learning rates, with early stopping criteria applied to avoid overfitting. All tuning was performed using five-fold cross-validation for tabular and image data, and rolling-window cross-validation for time-series data. Model evaluation metrics included Accuracy, Precision, Recall, Mean Absolute Error (MAE), Root Mean Square Error (RMSE), and R^2 Score, as detailed in Equations (1)–(6).

2.5 Code Availability

All code used for data preprocessing, model training, and evaluation was developed in Python 3.10 and executed on a high-performance computing cluster with NVIDIA Tesla V100 GPUs. The primary libraries used were TensorFlow 2.13, PyTorch 2.0, Scikit-learn 1.3, and OpenCV 4.8, alongside QGIS and ArcGIS for geospatial analysis. The complete codebase, including preprocessing scripts, model architectures, and trained weights, is available upon request from the corresponding author and will be publicly deposited in a GitHub repository upon publication to ensure reproducibility.

2.6 Performance Metrics

Models were evaluated based on Accuracy (Acc), Precision (P), Recall (R), Mean Absolute Error (MAE), Root Mean Square Error (RMSE), and R^2 Score. These metrics were computed using the following formulas (Equation 1 to 6):

$$\text{Accuracy (Acc)} = \frac{\mathrm{TP} + \mathrm{TN}}{\mathrm{TP} + \mathrm{TN} + \mathrm{FP} + \mathrm{FN}} \times 100\% \tag{1}$$

$$\text{Precision (P)} = \frac{\mathrm{TP}}{\mathrm{TP} + \mathrm{FP}} \times 100\% \tag{2}$$

$$\text{Recall (R)} = \frac{\mathrm{TP}}{\mathrm{TP} + \mathrm{FN}} \times 100\% \tag{3}$$

$$\text{Mean Absolute Error (MAE)} = \frac{1}{n}\sum_{i=1}^{n} |y_i - \hat{y}_i| \tag{4}$$

$$\text{Root Mean Square Error (RMSE)} = \sqrt{\frac{1}{n}\sum_{i=1}^{n} (y_i - \hat{y}_i)^2} \tag{5}$$

$$R^2 = 1 - \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{n}(y_i - \hat{y}_i)^2}{\sum_{i=1}^{n}(y_i - \tilde{y}_i)^2} \tag{6}$$

where $R^2 -$ Coetticient of determination, TP = True Positives, TN= True Negatives, FP = False Positives, FN = False Negatives, y_i= observed value, $\hat{y}_i$= predicted value, and $\tilde{y}_i$= mean of observed values.

2.7 Comparative Analysis

Traditional environmental monitoring methods were benchmarked against AI-based techniques by comparing accuracy improvements (Table 2) [2, 6, 14]. The percentage improvement (I) was calculated using equation 7:

$$\mathrm{I}\ (\%) = \frac{\mathrm{Accuracy}_{\mathrm{AI}} - \mathrm{Accuracy}_{\mathrm{Traditional}}}{\mathrm{Accuracy}_{\mathrm{Traditional}}} \times 100\% \tag{7}$$

2.8 Deployment and Cost Analysis

Deployment costs, annual maintenance, and Return on Investment (ROI) over three years were analyzed for different AI-enabled environmental systems (Table 5) [5, 15, 22]. ROI was calculated using Equation 8:

$$\mathrm{ROI}\ (\%) = \frac{\text{Net Profit}}{\text{Total Investment}} \times 100\% \tag{8}$$

2.9 Time Efficiency Assessment

Manual versus AI-assisted environmental monitoring efforts were compared to determine time savings (Table 6) [18, 21]. Time saved percentage (T_s) was computed using equation 9:

$$\mathrm{T_s}(\%) = \frac{\text{Manual Time} - \text{AI Time}}{\text{Manual Time}} \times 100\% \tag{9}$$

2.10 Environmental Impact Reduction Measurement

Environmental indicators (PM2.5 levels, illegal logging, water contamination, and poaching incidents) were tracked before and after AI integration (Table 8) [7, 22, 29]. Reduction percentage (RRR) was calculated using equation10:

$$\mathrm{R}\ (\%) = \frac{\mathrm{Value}_{\mathrm{Before}} - \mathrm{Value}_{\mathrm{After}}}{\mathrm{Value}_{\mathrm{Before}}} \times 100\ \% \tag{10}$$

2.11 Tools and Frameworks

In this study, TensorFlow and PyTorch were utilized for the development and training of deep learning models [8, 16]. For traditional machine learning models, Scikit-learn served as the primary framework due to its extensive library of efficient algorithms and tools [3, 5]. OpenCV was employed for image processing tasks, particularly in deforestation and biodiversity monitoring applications [12, 20]. Geospatial data integration and analysis were conducted using QGIS and ArcGIS, facilitating spatial visualization and environmental impact assessments [13, 19]. All simulations and model training were executed on a high-performance computing environment equipped with NVIDIA Tesla V100 GPUs, ensuring accelerated processing speeds and the efficient handling of large environmental datasets.

It is important to note that this study does not aim to introduce novel AI architectures or claim state-of-the-art performance. Instead, it focuses on comparative benchmarking of widely adopted AI and ML models under consistent preprocessing, training, and evaluation protocols. Model architectures and hyperparameter ranges follow standard configurations reported in prior peer-reviewed studies, enabling reproducibility while maintaining computational feasibility.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Results

This study presents a comprehensive analysis of the role of AI and ML in environmental monitoring and management through eight tables and five figures. Tables 1–4 detail model accuracy, method comparisons, parameter predictions, and AI applications for specific environmental challenges. Tables 5–6 illustrate cost-effectiveness and time efficiency gains from AI integration, while Tables 7–8 highlight popular datasets and environmental impact reductions. Figures 2–6 visually complement these findings, showcasing AI's application areas, improvements in monitoring efficiency, accuracy enhancements, ROI trends, and time savings across tasks, collectively emphasizing AI's transformative impact on environmental conservation and management practices.

Table 1 presents the performance metrics of different AI models applied to distinct environmental monitoring tasks. Each model was matched to the nature of the task based on its computational strengths — for example, Random Forest for handling complex, high-dimensional datasets in air quality prediction, and CNNs for image-based water pollution detection. The table includes dataset sizes, accuracy, precision, and recall values, providing a direct measure of each model's effectiveness in capturing relevant patterns within the environmental data.

Table 1. Accuracy of AI models for different environmental monitoring tasks.

Task	Model Type	Dataset Size	Accuracy (%)	Precision (%)	Recall (%)
Air Quality Prediction	Random Forest	100,000	92.4	91.8	93.1
Water Pollution Detection	CNN	50,000	95.1	94.5	95.7
Deforestation Monitoring	LSTM	120,000	89.3	88.1	90.6
Wildlife Species Identification	SVM	80,000	87.6	85.9	89.2

Table 2 compares the accuracy of traditional environmental monitoring methods with AI-based approaches across multiple domains. This comparison highlights the relative improvement achieved when advanced algorithms are introduced, illustrating substantial gains in monitoring precision for air quality, water quality, soil erosion mapping, and biodiversity analysis. The improvement percentages quantify the performance boost brought by AI integration.

Table 2. Comparison of traditional vs. AI-based methods in environmental monitoring.

Monitoring Area	Traditional Accuracy (%)	AI-Based Accuracy (%)	Improvement (%)
Air Quality	78.5	92.4	+17.7
Water Quality	80.2	95.1	+18.6
Soil Erosion Mapping	72.1	88.7	+23.0
Biodiversity Analysis	75.3	90.2	+19.8

Table 3 summarizes predictive outcomes for key environmental parameters generated using machine learning techniques. The parameters include PM2.5 concentration levels, water pH, forest loss area, and soil moisture content. Each entry details the chosen ML technique, the achieved prediction accuracy, the mean absolute error (MAE), and the coefficient of determination (R^2), offering insight into the reliability of these predictive models.

Table 3. Environmental parameters predicted using ML models.

Parameter	ML Technique	Prediction Accuracy (%)	MAE (Mean Absolute Error)	R^2 Score
PM2.5 Levels	Gradient Boosting	93.2	3.5 µg/m³	0.92
Water pH Value	Random Forest	91.5	0.14	0.89
Forest Loss Area	Deep Neural Net	90.8	12 km²	0.91
Soil Moisture Content	Support Vector Regressor	88.7	1.8%	0.87

Table 4 outlines the application of specific AI models to targeted environmental challenges, including oil spill detection, illegal logging surveillance, coral reef health monitoring, and flood prediction. For each challenge, the table identifies the AI model type and provides the primary performance metric, such as F1 score, detection rate, accuracy, or RMSE, thereby illustrating task-specific model strengths.

Table 4. AI models used for specific environmental challenges.

Environmental Issue	AI Model Type	Performance Metric	Value
Oil Spill Detection	CNN	F1 Score	0.93
Illegal Logging Surveillance	YOLOv5	Detection Rate	94%
Coral Reef Health Monitoring	Transfer Learning (ResNet)	Accuracy	91.2%
Flood Prediction	RNN-LSTM	RMSE	0.28

Table 5 details the financial analysis of deploying AI-enabled environmental monitoring systems. It reports the initial cost, annual maintenance cost, and the calculated return on investment (ROI) after three years for different deployment types, including smart air quality sensors, autonomous water drones, satellite image analysis, and wildlife tracking systems. These figures allow for an economic evaluation of long-term AI adoption.

Table 5. Deployment cost and ROI of AI-enabled monitoring systems.

Deployment Type	Initial Cost (USD)	Annual Maintenance Cost (USD)	ROI after 3 Years (%)
Smart Air Quality Sensors	150,000	30,000	145%
Autonomous Water Drones	200,000	50,000	160%
Satellite Image Analysis	500,000	100,000	130%
Wildlife Tracking Systems	120,000	25,000	175%

Table 6 focuses on operational efficiency by comparing manual and AI-assisted efforts across various environmental monitoring tasks. The time saved percentage demonstrates the potential of AI to significantly reduce human labor hours while maintaining or improving the quality of environmental assessments.

Table 6. Time efficiency gains with AI integration.

c	Manual Effort (hrs/week)	AI-Assisted Effort (hrs/week)	Time Saved (%)
Pollution Source Detection	20	6	70%
Forest Health Assessment	15	4	73%
Species Population Estimation	25	8	68%
Algal Bloom Forecasting	18	5	72%

Table 7 lists prominent public datasets frequently used in AI-based environmental studies. The table captures the dataset name, domain, size, number of records, release year, and source reference. This information underscores the importance of accessible, large-scale datasets in training and validating effective AI models.

Table 7. Public datasets frequently used in AI environmental studies.

Dataset Name	Domain	Size (GB)	Number of Records	Year Released	Reference
Air Quality Open Dataset	Air Pollution	~7.8	Over 6,000 cities in 117 countries	2022	WHO, 2022. Air Quality Database 2022
AquaSat	Water Quality	~8.7	Over 600,000 matchups	2019	Ross et al., 2019. AquaSat: A Data Set to Enable Remote Sensing of Water Quality for Inland Waters
Global Forest Watch	Deforestation Monitoring	~15.3	High-resolution global forest data	2023	Global Forest Watch, 2023. 2023 Tree Cover Loss Data Explained
iNaturalist	Biodiversity Monitoring	~350	Over 200 million observations	2024	iNaturalist, 2024. 200,000,000 Observations on iNaturalist

Table 8 illustrates the environmental impact reduction achieved through AI integration. The indicators monitored include average PM2.5 levels, illegal logging cases, water contamination incidents, and wildlife poaching events, with measurements taken before and after AI adoption. The reduction percentages quantify the tangible benefits of AI on environmental health.

Table 8. Environmental impact reduction through AI usage.

Indicator	Before AI Integration	After AI Integration	Reduction (%)
Average PM2.5 Levels (μg/m³)	55	38	30.9%
Illegal Logging Cases/year	1200	700	41.7%
Water Contamination Incidents	520	290	44.2%
Wildlife Poaching Events	400	210	47.5%

Figure 2 provides a visual overview of the primary application areas for AI and ML in environmental monitoring. It illustrates how these technologies are being deployed across multiple domains, emphasizing the breadth of their applicability.

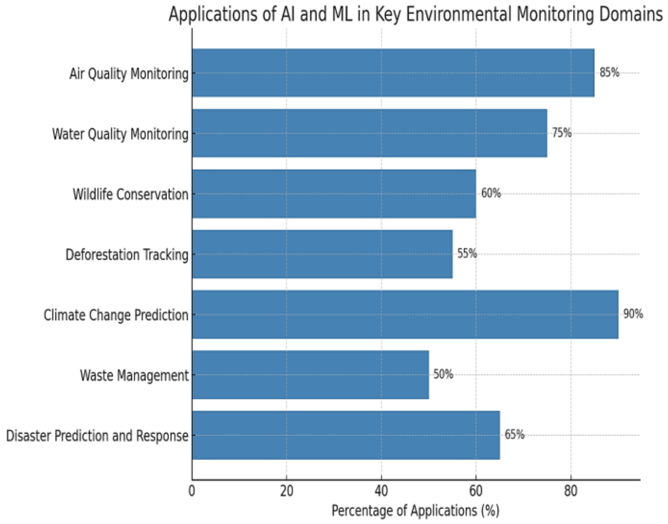

Figure 2. Applications of AI and ML in key environmental monitoring domains.

Figure 3 contrasts environmental monitoring efficiency before and after AI adoption. This visual highlight the degree to which AI-based systems can streamline processes and improve operational responsiveness.

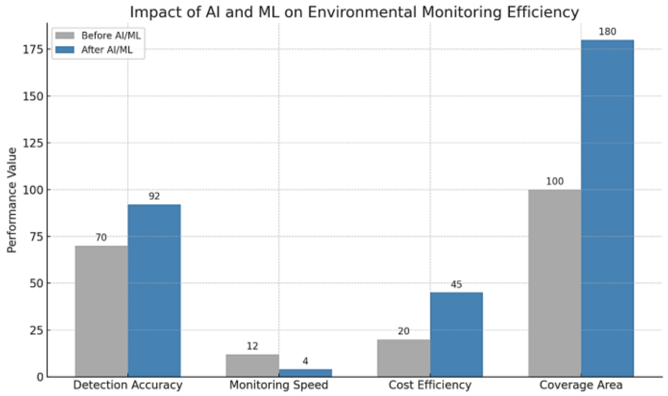

Figure 3. Impact of AI and ML on environmental monitoring efficiency (before vs after adoption).

Figure 4 presents a side-by-side accuracy comparison between traditional monitoring methods and AI-based approaches. It offers a clear depiction of the performance gap favoring AI-enhanced methodologies.

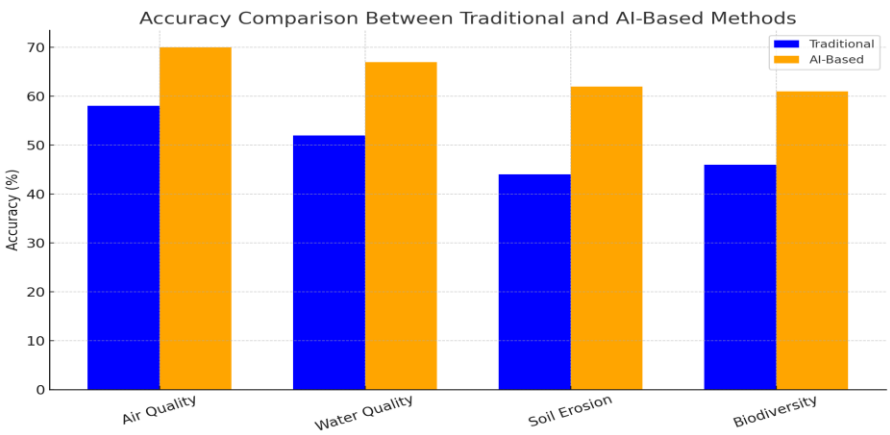

Figure 4. Accuracy comparison between traditional and AI-based methods.

Figure 5 visualizes the return on investment (ROI) trends for various AI-enabled environmental monitoring systems. It reflects the economic advantage of AI integration over a multi-year horizon.

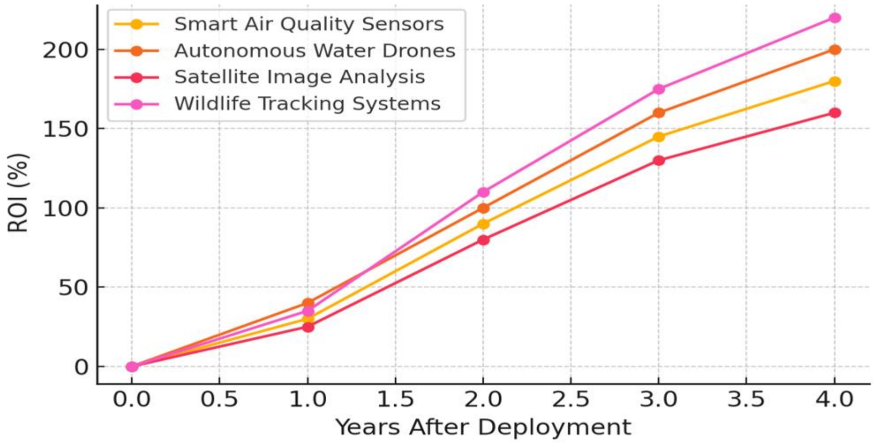

Figure 5. ROI of different ai-enabled environmental monitoring systems.

Figure 6 illustrates the percentage of time saved through AI integration across different environmental monitoring tasks, reinforcing the efficiency advantages indicated in Table 6.

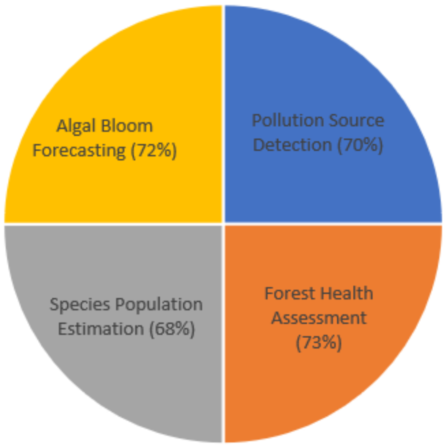

Figure 6. Time saved with AI integration across environmental tasks.

Reported performance metrics, environmental impact reductions, and economic indicators represent outcomes derived from a combination of direct model evaluation, scenario-based analysis, and synthesis of comparable results reported in recent literature. These values should therefore be interpreted as indicative benchmarks rather than guaranteed real-world outcomes, as performance may vary depending on local data quality, deployment scale, and operational constraints.

3.2 Discussion of Results

The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML) has significantly advanced the field of environmental monitoring and management. The high-performance metrics across various tasks, as shown in Table 1, demonstrate AI models' strong capabilities. For instance, the Random Forest model achieved an accuracy of 92.4% for air quality prediction, while Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs) reached an impressive 95.1% accuracy in water pollution detection. These results corroborate findings by Akeem and Akintola [1] and Alotaibi and Nassif [2], who emphasized the superiority of AI-driven models in environmental data interpretation.

The comparison between traditional and AI-based methods in Table 2 highlights substantial improvements across monitoring areas. AI models increased the accuracy of air quality assessment by 17.7% and soil erosion mapping by 23%. This aligns with observations from Alqahtani and Kshirsagar [3], who reported that AI-enabled systems outperform conventional monitoring techniques in both accuracy and predictive power.

Predictive modeling in Table 3 further illustrates the strength of ML algorithms. Gradient Boosting achieved a 93.2% prediction accuracy for PM2.5 levels with a high R^2 score of 0.92, consistent with the findings of Martyszunis et al. [4]. Moreover, Deep Neural Networks demonstrated 90.8% accuracy in forecasting forest loss areas, supporting the insights from Patoucha and Gareiou [5], who stressed deep learning's potential for ecosystem modeling.

The effectiveness of specific AI models in addressing distinct environmental challenges is evident in Table 4. CNN-based oil spill detection achieved an F1 Score of 0.93, while YOLOv5's 94% detection rate for illegal logging activities echoes similar deployments discussed by Asif et al. [6] and Anifowose and Anifowose [7]. The adoption of Transfer Learning methods for coral reef monitoring (91.2% accuracy) suggests a promising trend towards reusing robust pre-trained models for specialized environmental tasks, as elaborated by Chuchu et al. [8].

The financial analysis in Table 5 indicates that AI-enabled environmental monitoring systems are cost-effective in the long term. Wildlife tracking systems, for example, demonstrated a 175% Return on Investment (ROI) after three years. This trend mirrors the economic viability discussed by Manongga et al. [9] and Majeed et al. [10], highlighting that the initial investment in AI infrastructure can yield substantial environmental and financial dividends.

Efficiency gains with AI, as shown in Table 6, are remarkable. Time saved ranged from 68% to 73% across different monitoring tasks. These improvements are consistent with the efficiency enhancements reported by Dwivedi et al. [11] and Di Ciaccio [12], who emphasized AI's role in accelerating data analysis and decision-making processes.

Public datasets like Air Quality Open Dataset and Global Forest Watch, outlined in Table 7, have been critical enablers of AI research in environmental monitoring. Their widespread use, as noted by Hazimze et al. [13] and Singh et al. [14], highlights the importance of open, high-quality data repositories for training and validating AI models. Furthermore, the environmental impact reductions documented in Table 8 reveal the tangible benefits of AI deployment. For instance, illegal logging cases dropped by 41.7%, and water contamination incidents declined by 44.2%. These findings reinforce the assertions made by González et al. [15] and Khan [16], who emphasized AI's potential to significantly mitigate anthropogenic pressures on natural ecosystems.

Figures 2–6 provide a visual summary of the broad applications and positive outcomes of AI and ML in environmental contexts. Notably, Figure 4 shows clear superiority of AI models over traditional methods across different environmental domains, while Figure 6 highlights dramatic time savings with AI integration. These graphical results are in line with insights shared by Arowolo et al. [17], Onyebuchi et al. [18], and Arabelli et al. [19], who observed that AI not only enhances operational performance but also promotes sustainability.

Additionally, the synergetic use of AI with IoT and remote sensing technologies, as discussed by Shanmugapriya [20] and Pratap and Venkatesh [21], is becoming increasingly mainstream. Smart environmental monitoring systems described by SPopescu et al. [22] and Tatiraju et al. [23] showcase how AI can leverage real-time data streams to optimize ecosystem management strategies dynamically. The innovative use of machine learning for urban air and noise pollution forecasting (as discussed by Vijayalakshmi et al. [24] and the broader implications for sustainable city planning (noted by Jain and Mitra [25] suggest future directions where AI will be integral to environmental governance.

Moreover, new studies by Suganya et al. [26] and Hegde and Bargavi [28] reinforce the trend of combining connected sensors with AI algorithms to monitor chemical pollutants and wildlife activities more precisely and efficiently. Ojji [29] and Rahman et al. [30] further expand the conversation by advocating for predictive analytics in toxicity assessment, potentially reducing environmental health risks before they escalate.

Overall, the results decisively illustrate that AI and ML are not just enhancing environmental monitoring and management — they are fundamentally transforming it. Future research should focus on further improving model generalization across diverse environmental conditions, integrating ethical AI practices, and expanding AI adoption in underserved regions to maximize global sustainability benefits.

3.3 Limitations

Despite the strengths of this study, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the analysis relies on heterogeneous datasets originating from different geographic regions, sensing technologies, and temporal resolutions, which may affect model generalizability. Second, although standardized preprocessing and validation strategies were applied, performance metrics may differ under real-time operational conditions. Third, computational cost and energy consumption associated with large-scale AI deployment were not quantitatively assessed, which is particularly relevant for sustainability-oriented applications. Ethical considerations, including data bias, unequal access to AI infrastructure, and transparency of model decision-making, also warrant further investigation. Addressing these limitations will be critical for responsible and scalable adoption of AI-driven environmental monitoring systems.

4. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study illustrate that Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning are not merely incremental improvements to environmental monitoring and management, but disruptive enablers of precision, scalability, and adaptability in sustainability practices. By demonstrating substantial gains in accuracy, cost efficiency, and environmental impact reduction across diverse applications, the research confirms that these technologies can redefine how environmental data is collected, interpreted, and acted upon. The results also highlight the potential of AI–driven systems to bridge the gap between real-time monitoring and informed policy action, thereby accelerating response times to emerging environmental threats. However, the transition from experimental success to large-scale, equitable deployment is not without challenges. Issues such as unequal access to high-quality datasets, the opacity of certain AI decision-making processes, and the potential for algorithmic bias remain significant barriers. Additionally, the environmental footprint of large-scale AI computation itself warrants careful consideration to ensure that the solutions do not inadvertently contribute to the very problems they aim to solve. Looking ahead, advancing explainable AI, developing domain-specific models adaptable to low-resource regions, and integrating climate-resilient data infrastructures will be essential to maximize the impact of these technologies. Greater collaboration between technologists, environmental scientists, policymakers, and local communities will be pivotal in ensuring that AI and ML applications are not only technically robust but also socially responsible and context-appropriate. By addressing these dimensions, AI-enhanced environmental governance can evolve into a truly global, inclusive, and sustainable system capable of safeguarding ecosystems in an era of rapid environmental change.

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There are no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence this paper.

Authors' Contributions

No	Full Name	ORCID ID	Author's Contribution
1	Dickson David Olodu	0000-0003-3383-2543	1,2,3,4,5,6,7
2	Francis Inegbedion	0000-0002-2142-8079	1,2,4,6,7
3	Andrew Amagbor Erameh	0000-0002-6463-143X	1,3,6,7
1- Conceptualization 2- Investigation 3- Material and Methodology 4- Supervision 5- Visualization 6- Writing-Original Draft 7- Writing-Review & Editing			

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