

OPTIMIZING PRODUCTIVITY IN METALWORK MANUFACTURING THROUGH TECHNOLOGICAL ADOPTION IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This research examined the impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies on optimizing manufacturing processes in Nigeria's manufacturing industry, emphasizing critical outcomes such as efficiency, productivity, and product quality. Data were obtained using structured questionnaires from a sample of 342 respondents from Ajaokuta Steel Company Limited and Universal Steel Nigeria Ltd. The outcomes were examined using multiple regression models. The findings indicate a strong positive correlation between technological adoption and productivity optimization, with a regression coefficient of 0.583 and a statistically significant p-value of 0.000. Improved infrastructure and workforce skill levels were also found to significantly enhance productivity, with coefficients of 0.245 and 0.198, respectively. Furthermore, the study revealed that technological advancements contribute significantly to product quality improvements, as evidenced by a coefficient of 0.502 and a p-value of 0.000. Larger firms with greater financial resources demonstrated a higher capacity for technological integration, as indicated by a coefficient of 0.269 and a p-value of 0.002. These results align with existing literature highlighting the role of automation and digital technologies in enhancing efficiency and reducing defects in manufacturing. The study concludes that modern technology adoption is essential for productivity growth in Nigeria's metalwork sector. However, challenges such as inadequate infrastructure and skill gaps persist. It recommends strategic investments in infrastructure, targeted workforce training, and supportive policies to strengthen the sector's competitiveness and contribute to Nigeria's industrialization.

INTRODUCTION

The Nigerian metalwork manufacturing sector faces numerous challenges that hinder optimal productivity and competitiveness. These include inadequate infrastructure, high energy costs, inefficient production processes, a shortage of skilled labor, and limited access to advanced manufacturing technologies. Structural inefficiencies have resulted in persistently low output and product quality compared to global and regional counterparts [Ogunleye, 2023]. Additionally, the sector has been slow to embrace emerging technologies, particularly automation, robotics, and digital manufacturing systems, which have revolutionized metalworking industries in advanced economies. As a result, Nigeria's metalwork manufacturing remains largely characterized by inefficiency, high production costs, and inconsistent product quality. However, technological advancements offer the potential to mitigate these inefficiencies by enhancing precision, reducing waste, and optimizing production workflows. Despite these prospects, the adoption of advanced manufacturing technologies in Nigeria remains limited due to high capital investment requirements, lack of technical expertise, and infrastructural deficits [Adekunle et al., 2023].

Over the years, efforts have been made to modernize metalwork manufacturing processes through automation and digital transformation. Many firms have integrated Computer Numerical Control (CNC) machines, Computer-Aided Design and Manufacturing (CAD/CAM) systems, and other digital tools to enhance operational efficiency. While these technologies have improved productivity to some extent, they often lack the intelligent adaptability offered by more advanced solutions, such as artificial intelligence (AI), the Internet of Things (IoT), and smart manufacturing systems [Eze et al., 2024]. The widespread implementation of such technologies has been transformative in global manufacturing, enabling predictive maintenance, real-time monitoring, and process automation that significantly enhance production output [(Kamble et al., 2018; Xu et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2023].

Across industrialized nations, the adoption of technology in metalwork manufacturing has yielded substantial benefits. Advanced robotics and AI-driven automation have minimized human errors, improved precision, and increased production speeds. Smart sensors and IoT-enabled systems allow real-time data collection, facilitating predictive maintenance that reduces unplanned downtime and operational disruptions. Machine learning algorithms assist in optimizing supply chains and resource allocation, ensuring a seamless and cost-effective manufacturing process. These innovations have driven significant improvements in efficiency, waste reduction, and profitability in metalwork industries worldwide [Agrawal et al., 2023].

Technological advancements, particularly automation and AI-driven systems, stand out as key enablers of process optimization in metalwork manufacturing. These systems analyze vast amounts of real-time data, providing actionable insights that enhance decision-making and workflow management. Predictive analytics help manufacturers anticipate equipment failures, schedule timely maintenance, and prevent costly production halts. Furthermore, digital twin technology and AI-powered quality control systems improve product consistency and reduce defects, ensuring higher-quality outputs [Adenekan et al., 2024]. The integration of these innovations into Nigeria's metalwork sector could lead to a more streamlined, cost-effective, and globally competitive industry [Adekunle et al., 2023].

Despite the potential benefits of technological adoption, several barriers hinder widespread implementation in Nigeria's metalwork manufacturing sector. These challenges include the high cost of acquiring and maintaining advanced machinery, limited access to financial support, inadequate technical expertise, and resistance to change among industry stakeholders.

Additionally, unreliable power supply remains a critical issue, as most advanced manufacturing systems require a stable energy source for optimal performance. Furthermore, the absence of strong regulatory frameworks and supportive government policies has slowed the pace of technological advancement in the sector. Nonetheless, with the right investments in infrastructure, capacity-building, and policy reforms, technology adoption could play a transformative role in the future of Nigeria's metalwork industry [Bunian et al., 2024].

Empirical evidence from various global markets demonstrates that firms leveraging digital manufacturing technologies report significant improvements in productivity and profitability. Automation reduces reliance on manual labor, minimizes operational inefficiencies, and enables manufacturers to meet increasing demand with greater precision. AI-driven systems enhance production planning and resource utilization, helping companies optimize supply chains and minimize production costs. Predictive maintenance has proven to reduce downtime by up to 40%, resulting in substantial cost savings and improved overall equipment effectiveness (OEE) [Adeoye & Elegbede, 2022].

In Nigeria, some large-scale metalwork enterprises have begun to explore the use of automation and digital manufacturing systems. Companies involved in steel fabrication, aluminum processing, and machining have incorporated CNC machines, laser cutting systems, and automated welding technologies to improve efficiency and precision. However, the adoption of such technologies remains largely concentrated among a few large firms, while small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) continue to struggle with traditional, labor-intensive methods. Addressing these disparities through targeted technological interventions and policy support could significantly enhance the sector's overall productivity and competitiveness.

This study aims to analyze the impact of technology adoption on optimizing productivity in Nigeria's metalwork manufacturing sector. The research seeks to identify key factors influencing technology adoption, assess the effects of automation and digital manufacturing systems on efficiency and profitability, and explore how emerging innovations can be leveraged to enhance product quality and output.

The study is guided by the following hypotheses:

- **H₁:** There is a significant relationship between critical factors (e.g., infrastructure, workforce skill level, and investment costs) and the successful optimization of metalwork manufacturing processes through technology adoption.
- **H₂:** Technological advancements, such as automation and AI-driven systems, have a positive impact on efficiency, productivity, and profitability in the Nigerian metalwork manufacturing industry.
- **H₃:** The adoption of advanced manufacturing technologies significantly enhances product quality and increases output in Nigeria's metalwork sector.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive research design combined with quantitative analysis to assess the impact of technological adoption on productivity in Nigeria's metalwork manufacturing sector. The design was chosen to enable a comprehensive evaluation of patterns, correlations, and potential causal relationships between technological adoption and manufacturing outcomes, such as efficiency, productivity, and product quality. Structured questionnaires were used to collect primary data, while regression analysis was employed to test hypotheses and model relationships between key variables.

Population and Sampling Technique

The population for this study included two major Nigerian metalwork manufacturing firms: Ajaokuta Steel Company Limited and Universal Steel Nigeria Ltd, both of which are headquartered in Lagos State. A probability sampling technique was utilized, with stratified random sampling identified as the most appropriate method. Stratified random sampling involves dividing the population into distinct strata based on shared characteristics, such as different departments within the firms. Samples were then drawn randomly from each stratum to ensure proper representation.

This approach was selected for the following reasons:

1. **Ensuring Compatibility:** Stratified random sampling ensures that all relevant departments such as production and operations, engineering, supply chain and logistics, human resources, and finance are adequately represented in the sample. Each department has a unique perspective on how technology adoption influences their processes.
2. **Reducing Bias:** By selecting participants randomly within each stratum, the likelihood of sampling bias is minimized, ensuring the sample accurately reflects the diverse characteristics of the workforce.

Sample Size Determination

The sample size was determined using the standard formula for stratified random sampling:

$$n = \frac{N \times Z^2 \times p \times (1 - p)}{e^2 \times (N - 1) + Z^2 \times p \times (1 - p)}$$

Where:

- **n** = required sample size
- **N** = total population size (3200 employees from both companies)
- **Z** = Z-value for 95% confidence level (1.96)
- **p** = estimated proportion of the population (0.5 for maximum sample size)
- **e** = margin of error (0.05)

Substituting the values:

$$\begin{aligned} n &= \frac{3200 \times 1.96^2 \times 0.5 \times 0.5}{0.05^2 \times (3200 - 1) + 1.96^2 \times 0.5 \times 0.5} \\ &= 342 \end{aligned}$$

The estimated sample size for this study is approximately 342 participants. A stratified random sample of 342 employees from Ajaokuta Steel Company Limited and Universal Steel Nigeria Ltd was deemed sufficient to generate statistically reliable findings on the impact of technological adoption on productivity in metalwork manufacturing.

Data Collection Instrument

The primary data for this study was gathered using a structured questionnaire designed to capture detailed information on the extent of technological adoption, the specific technologies in use, and their perceived impact on manufacturing performance. The questionnaire was divided into four key sections corresponding to the research objectives:

- **Section A:** Demographic details of respondents (e.g., industry type, firm size, role of respondent)
- **Section B:** Technological adoption and usage (e.g., types of technologies implemented, duration of use)
- **Section C:** Impact of technology on efficiency, productivity, and profitability
- **Section D:** Effect of technology on product quality and overall output

A Likert scale (ranging from 1 to 5, with 1 representing "strongly disagree" and 5 representing "strongly agree") was used to measure respondents' views on various aspects of technological adoption. The questionnaire was administered to senior management and technical staff directly involved in decision-making and operations related to technology integration within their firms.

A total of 315 valid responses were collected from employees in different departments, including administration, technical/engineering, management, and operations. The collected data was analyzed using statistical techniques, including descriptive analysis and regression modeling, to determine the extent to which technological adoption influences productivity in the metalwork manufacturing sector in Nigeria.

Data Analysis Method

The data analysis process for this study involved both descriptive and inferential statistics to examine the impact of technological adoption on productivity in metalwork manufacturing in Nigeria. Descriptive statistics, including mean, standard deviation, frequency, and percentages, were utilized to summarize and provide an overview of key data attributes. These statistics offered insights into the extent of technology adoption and its perceived influence on metalwork manufacturing processes. To investigate the relationships between technology adoption and manufacturing outcomes, multiple regression analysis was employed. This statistical technique enabled the evaluation of the impact of technology deployment on efficiency, productivity, profitability, and product quality in the metalwork industry.

Model Specification

The regression model for this study was designed based on the research objectives and underlying hypotheses. The dependent variables included efficiency, productivity, profitability, and product quality, while the independent variable was technological adoption, measured by the extent to which metalwork enterprises have integrated new technologies into their production processes. Control variables, such as firm size, industry type, and workforce skill level, were incorporated to account for potential external influences on manufacturing performance.

The general form of the regression equation is:

$$Y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \dots + \epsilon$$

Where:

Y_i = Manufacturing process optimization (measured by efficiency, productivity, profitability, or product quality)

β_0 = Constant (intercept)

X_1 = Technology adoption level (e.g., types of technologies implemented)

X_2 = Firm size (control variable)

X_3 = Industry type (control variable)

ϵ = Error term

Regression Model for Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis 1 (H_1): There is a significant relationship between critical factors (e.g., infrastructure, workforce skill level, and cost) and the successful optimization of manufacturing processes using technological advancements.

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Efficiency} = & \beta_0 + \beta_1(\text{Tech_Adoption}) \\ & + \beta_2(\text{Infrastructure}) \\ & + \beta_3(\text{Workforce_Skill}) + \epsilon \end{aligned}$$

Hypothesis 2 (H_2): Technology-driven optimizations positively impact efficiency, productivity, and profitability in Nigeria's metalwork manufacturing industry.

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Product_Quality} = & \beta_0 + \beta_1(\text{AI_Adoption}) \\ & + \beta_2(\text{Firm_Size}) \\ & + \beta_3(\text{Workforce_Skill}) + \epsilon \end{aligned}$$

Hypothesis 3 (H_3): The adoption of new technologies significantly enhances product quality and improves manufacturing output in the Nigerian metalwork manufacturing sector.

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Productivity} = & \beta_0 + \beta_1(\text{AI_Adoption}) \\ & + \beta_2(\text{Firm_Size}) \\ & + \beta_3(\text{Industry_Type}) + \epsilon \end{aligned}$$

In these models, Technology Adoption represents the extent of technology use within metalwork manufacturing businesses, while infrastructure, workforce skill level, firm size, and industry type serve as control variables that account for contextual factors influencing the manufacturing process.

Validity and Reliability

To ensure the validity and reliability of the research instruments, a pilot test was conducted with a small group of metalwork manufacturing enterprises before full-scale data collection. This pilot test facilitated the refinement of questionnaire items, ensuring clarity and relevance

to the study's objectives. Content validity was established by aligning questionnaire items with the research goals and consulting industry experts specializing in metalwork manufacturing and technology adoption. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha test to measure the internal consistency of questionnaire responses. A Cronbach's Alpha score of 0.70 or higher was considered acceptable, ensuring that the data collected was both dependable and robust for further analysis.

RESULTS, INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The regression findings in Table 1 reveal a strong correlation between technological adoption and productivity optimization in Nigeria's metalwork manufacturing sector. The coefficient for technological adoption is 0.583, indicating that each unit increase in technology utilization corresponds to an average increase of 0.583 units in productivity. The relationship is statistically significant, as evidenced by a p-value of 0.000, which falls well below the 0.05 threshold. These findings align with previous research demonstrating that advanced technologies, such as automation and digital fabrication, enhance production efficiency and quality [Okonkwo et al., 2021; Adebayo et al., 2023].

The role of infrastructure is significant, with a coefficient of 0.245 and a p-value of 0.004. This suggests that improvements in industrial infrastructure, including power supply and smart machinery, contribute significantly to productivity growth. These results underscore the necessity of a robust infrastructural base for the effective deployment of advanced technology in metalwork manufacturing [Agwu, 2022].

Workforce skill level also plays a crucial role, with a coefficient of 0.198 and a p-value of 0.039, signifying a meaningful correlation between employee competence and productivity. This finding highlights the need for continuous training and skill development to optimize the benefits of technological adoption in metal fabrication [Ibrahim et al., 2023].

Table 1. Regression Analysis for Productivity

Variable	Coefficient	Standard Error	t-Statistic	p-Value
Technological Adoption	0.583	0.069	8.45	0.000***
Infrastructure	0.245	0.081	3.02	0.004**
Workforce Skill	0.198	0.090	2.07	0.039*
Constant	1.115	0.187	5.96	0.000***

$R^2 = 0.776$; Adjusted $R^2 = 0.765$; F-statistic = 78.31; $p < 0.0001$

Table 2 further examines the impact of technology adoption on product quality in Nigeria's metalwork sector. The coefficient for technological adoption is 0.502, confirming a strong positive correlation with product quality. The statistical significance of this relationship, as shown by a p-value of 0.000, aligns with findings that emphasize automation's role in enhancing precision and reducing defects in metalwork [Chen et al., 2023; Lee et al., 2021].

Firm size is another significant factor, with a coefficient of 0.269 and a p-value of 0.002. This suggests that larger firms with greater financial resources are better positioned to integrate advanced manufacturing technologies. Workforce skill, with a coefficient of 0.211 and a p-

value of 0.031, further highlights the importance of technical training for quality improvements in metal products [Teerasoponpong & Sugunnasil, 2022].

Table 2. Regression Analysis for Product Quality

Variable	Coefficient	Standard Error	t-Statistic	p-Value
Technological Adoption	0.502	0.073	6.87	0.000***
Firm Size	0.269	0.076	3.54	0.002**
Workforce Skill	0.211	0.089	2.21	0.031*
Constant	1.034	0.182	5.68	0.000***

$R^2 = 0.748$; Adjusted $R^2 = 0.736$; F-statistic = 71.24; $p < 0.0001$

Table 3 highlights the significant relationship between technology adoption and product quality in metalwork manufacturing. The coefficient for Technology Adoption is 0.495, signifying that increased use of advanced technologies correlates with improved product quality. A p-value of 0.000 confirms the statistical significance of this relationship, aligning with studies that emphasize AI-driven quality control, real-time monitoring, and predictive analytics as key drivers of superior product outcomes [Chen et al., 2023; Lee et al., 2020].

Firm Size also plays a crucial role in ensuring product quality, with a coefficient of 0.285 and a p-value of 0.001, indicating that larger firms are more likely to invest in quality-enhancing technologies. Workforce Skill similarly exhibits a significant effect, with a coefficient of 0.206 and a p-value of 0.022. This finding underscores the importance of continuous skill development among workers to ensure effective deployment of quality-enhancing technologies [Teerasoponpong & Sugunnasil, 2022; Mmadubuobi et al., 2024].

Table 3. Regression Analysis for Product Quality

Variable	Coefficient	Standard Error	t-Statistic	p-Value
Technology Adoption	0.495	0.073	6.78	0.000***
Firm Size	0.285	0.077	3.70	0.001**
Workforce Skill	0.206	0.086	2.33	0.022*
Constant	1.219	0.170	7.17	0.000***

$R^2 = 0.741$; Adjusted $R^2 = 0.730$; F-statistic = 71.89; $p < 0.0001$

Discussion Of Findings

Statistical Model Used:

Where:

- Metalwork manufacturing process optimization (measured by efficiency, productivity, profitability, or product quality)
- Constant (intercept)
- Technology adoption level (e.g., AI, automation, digital tools)
- Firm size (control variable)
- Industry type (control variable)
- Error term

This study's findings provide essential insights into the influence of technological adoption on optimizing productivity in metalwork manufacturing in Nigeria. The regression models used to analyze correlations between technology adoption and key manufacturing performance indicators efficiency, productivity, and product quality yielded significant findings aligned with the study's objectives.

The results underscore the importance of technological implementation as a pivotal factor affecting efficiency, productivity, and product quality in metalwork manufacturing. The substantial coefficients for technology adoption across all models indicate that firms that integrate modern technological solutions achieve remarkable improvements in their operational performance. This directly supports the study's primary objective, confirming that technological adoption is essential for optimizing manufacturing processes in Nigeria's metalwork industry.

A strong positive correlation was identified between technological adoption and enhanced efficiency (Table 1), productivity (Table 2), and product quality (Table 3). The statistical significance of these results suggests that digital transformation in metalwork manufacturing is both a practical and strategic move. These findings affirm the second research objective, demonstrating that adopting advanced technology leads to improved profitability by optimizing processes and elevating the quality of manufactured goods.

The study further establishes that technological tools significantly enhance product quality, as evidenced by the high coefficient for technology adoption in Table 3. This finding aligns with the third research objective, reinforcing the argument that modern manufacturing technologies, such as AI-driven automation and precision engineering tools, enable firms to produce high-quality metal products. This improvement in quality contributes to customer satisfaction, competitive advantage, and increased market penetration.

CONCLUSION

This study provides compelling evidence of the transformative impact of technological adoption on productivity optimization in the Nigerian metalwork manufacturing sector. The findings highlight a robust positive correlation between technology integration and improvements in efficiency, productivity, and product quality, thereby fulfilling the study's objectives. The research underscores that adopting advanced technologies is not merely an optional enhancement but a necessity for manufacturing firms seeking to improve operational performance and sustain competitiveness in a rapidly evolving global market.

The significant regression coefficients indicate that technological tools are vital in achieving operational excellence in metalwork manufacturing. By effectively integrating AI, automation, and other digital solutions, manufacturers can streamline processes, reduce operational costs,

and enhance profitability. Moreover, the study emphasizes the critical role of workforce development, as skilled labor is essential to maximizing the benefits of technological adoption.

This research contributes to the existing body of knowledge by validating the positive impact of technology adoption within the context of a developing economy like Nigeria. The consistency of these findings with prior research strengthens the reliability of the results, demonstrating that digital transformation has widespread applicability across various industrial settings.

Beyond theoretical contributions, this study offers practical recommendations for manufacturers, policymakers, and industry stakeholders. Metalwork manufacturing firms are encouraged to prioritize the adoption of advanced technologies and invest in the necessary infrastructure and workforce training to fully leverage these innovations. Policymakers should create an enabling environment that promotes technological integration through favorable policies, financial support, and incentives for digital transformation.

Future research should explore sector-specific applications of technological adoption in metalwork manufacturing, conduct longitudinal studies to assess long-term effects, and incorporate qualitative analyses to gain deeper insights into the challenges and opportunities associated with digital transformation. Addressing these areas in future studies will provide more nuanced perspectives that can further inform strategic decision-making in the industry.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to optimize productivity in metalwork manufacturing through technological adoption in Nigeria:

1. Metalwork manufacturing firms should prioritize the adoption of Artificial Intelligence (AI), automation, and digital manufacturing technologies.
2. The government and private sector should invest in developing reliable infrastructure, including stable electricity, broadband internet, and modern manufacturing facilities.
3. Policymakers should introduce supportive policies, tax incentives, and financial grants to encourage small and medium-sized metalwork firms to invest in advanced manufacturing technologies.
4. Metalwork manufacturers should engage in partnerships and industry networks to facilitate knowledge sharing on best practices in technological adoption.
5. Companies should integrate smart manufacturing systems such as the Internet of Things (IoT), real-time monitoring, and predictive maintenance.

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