

PROLIFERATION OF COLLEGES OF EDUCATION AND ITS IMPLICATIONS ON THE STANDARD OF EDUCATION IN PLATEAU STATE: THE CASE OF SPOKEN AND WRITTEN FRENCH

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ABSTRACT

The declining communicative competence of students of French in Colleges of Education in Plateau State has become a growing source of concern, particularly their inability to demonstrate basic spoken and written proficiency even at the graduating levels. This study investigates the proliferation of Colleges of Education as one of the structural factors contributing to the erosion of educational standards, with specific reference to spoken and written French. The descriptive survey research design was adopted. Data were collected through structured questionnaires administered to officials of the Plateau State Ministry of Higher Education, institutional management staff, lecturers, and students across thirteen Colleges of Education in Plateau State. A total of 224 respondents participated in the study, and data were analysed using percentage analysis. Findings reveal that the rapid increase in the number of Colleges of Education has exacerbated the unhealthy competition for student enrolment, leading to compromised admission procedures, weakened academic standards, and relaxed assessment practices. These compromises have significantly undermined effective language acquisition, resulting in poor spoken and written French competence among students. The study concludes that unchecked institutional proliferation has shifted competition from academic excellence to institutional survival, with adverse consequences for the general goals of higher education. The paper recommends stricter regulatory enforcement, needs-based institutional approval, and quality-focused funding mechanisms to restore academic standards and improve language competence outcomes.

KEYWORDS: Proliferation, Colleges of Education, Educational Standards, Spoken French, Written French, and Higher Education.

INTRODUCTION

Education remains the most strategic instrument for national development, human capacity building, and social transformation. Across societies, the quality of education largely determines the quality of leadership, governance, innovation, and economic productivity. In Nigeria, however, there is a growing scholarly consensus that the education sector, particularly higher education, is experiencing a persistent decline in standards and outcomes. Besong (2022) describes the state of education in Nigeria as being “in bad shape,” a characterization that has become increasingly common in academic discourse. This decline is particularly troubling given that education, as Adebisi (2014) argues, constitutes the backbone of societal progress, while Minakshi and James (2015) emphasize its role in refining human intellect and guiding productive action.

Colleges of Education occupy a critical position within Nigeria’s higher education architecture. Established following the Ashby Commission Report of 1960 and later formalized as NCE-awarding institutions in 1971, Colleges of Education were designed to produce professionally competent teachers, capable of driving national development through quality instruction at the basic and secondary school levels (Ekeng, 2022; Oladunjoye & Omenu, 2013). For several decades, the system operated with relatively few institutions, and competition among them was largely oriented toward academic excellence, graduate quality, and institutional reputation.

In recent decades, however, Nigeria’s higher education landscape has undergone a rapid and largely unchecked expansion, particularly through the proliferation of private Colleges of Education. Plateau State exemplifies this trend. From having only three NCE-awarding institutions for several decades, the State now hosts numerous Colleges of Education, most of which were established within the last and present decades (Meta AI, 14/12/2025). While increased access to education is often desirable, this study argues that the pace, motivation, and regulatory handling of this proliferation have generated serious unintended consequences for educational standards.

Rather than fostering healthy competition based on quality and innovation, the proliferation of Colleges of Education in Plateau State has intensified competition for student enrolment. Ekeng (2022) observes that although higher education provision has moved beyond government monopoly, regulatory capacity has not expanded proportionately. Institutions increasingly operate under survival pressure, driven by financial sustainability concerns and enrolment thresholds required for continued operation and access to public funding. This pressure has been further heightened by the Federal Ministry of Education and TETFund policy pronouncement of May 2025, which proposed withdrawing funding from tertiary institutions with enrolments below 2,000 students (Punch, 16/05/2025).

In this survival-driven environment, admission standards and academic practices are frequently compromised. Institutions increasingly admit students who do not meet minimum entry requirements, including candidates without JAMB admission, with substandard scores, or without prerequisite credits in their chosen

disciplines. Such practices erode merit-based principles and undermine the focus on the goals of higher education. As Omeje and Mfon (2008) cautioned, sustained deviation from established standards inevitably leads to institutional decay and declining educational outcomes.

The consequences of these systemic compromises are particularly visible in the teaching and learning of French in Colleges of Education. Language education requires sustained exposure, disciplined practice, and rigorous assessment. French, as a foreign language in Nigeria, depends on the development of four interrelated skills (speaking, listening, reading, and writing), which together enable functional communication (Dan'Azumi *et al.*, 1998). Spoken French, as the primary mode of language use, demands lexical competence, grammatical accuracy, appropriate pronunciation, and pragmatic sensitivity, while written French requires good spelling and accurate punctuation for the enhancement of communication clarity.

Ironically, Colleges of Education, mandated by the National Policy on Education to produce skilled, intellectually grounded, and professionally competent teachers, are increasingly graduating French students who lack basic communicative competence. Many final-year students are unable to engage in elementary conversations or produce simple written texts in French. This reality stands in sharp contrast to the goals of higher education outlined in the National Policy on Education (Federal Republic of Nigeria [FRN], 2024), particularly those relating to intellectual development, skill acquisition, and self-reliance.

While several scholars have attributed declining educational outcomes in Nigeria to poor funding (Amadi & Nwogu, 2023), the collapse of societal values (Omeje & Mfon, 2008), or the disruptive influence of social media (Gurumtang, 2024), these explanations do not sufficiently interrogate the structural consequences of institutional proliferation. This reveals three critical gaps: a policy gap concerning regulatory control over institutional expansion; an institutional gap regarding how enrolment pressure reshapes academic standards; and an empirical gap linking these dynamics directly to subject-specific competence, such as spoken and written French. This study addresses these gaps.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of this study are to:

- i. Ascertain the extent of the proliferation of Colleges of Education in Plateau State.
- ii. Determine whether the proliferation of Colleges of Education contributes to the declining standard of education in Plateau State and Nigeria at large.
- iii. Examine the extent to which the declining standard of education affects students' competence in spoken and written French.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study seeks to provide answers to the following research questions:

1. Is there a proliferation of Colleges of Education in Plateau State?

2. Does the proliferation of Colleges of Education in Plateau State affect the standard of education?
3. To what extent does the declining standard of education influence students' spoken and written French competence?

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design, appropriate for examining institutional practices, stakeholder perceptions, and behavioural patterns within existing educational settings (Asenahabi, 2019). The research was conducted across the thirteen identified Colleges of Education in Plateau State and the Plateau State Ministry of Higher Education. The population comprised four respondent categories: Ministry officials, institutional management staff, lecturers, and students. A total of 147 respondents were selected using purposive and simple random sampling techniques. Data were collected through structured questionnaires aligned with the study's objectives and research questions.

The instrument was divided into three sections addressing: (i) the extent of institutional proliferation, (ii) its influence on admission and academic standards, and (iii) the impact of compromised standards on students' learning behaviours and competence in spoken and written French. Data were analysed using percentage analysis, enabling clear comparison across respondent groups.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Findings revealed unanimous agreement among Ministry officials and institutional management that Colleges of Education have proliferated significantly in Plateau State. Respondents further confirmed that enrolment pressure has become a defining feature of institutional operations. Over 90% of management respondents admitted that admission and academic standards are compromised to attract students. Students' responses corroborated this, with a notable proportion reporting admission without credit requirements and even without having sat for Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) examination.

Lecturers overwhelmingly reported that students rarely meet expected learning outcomes in spoken and written French. More than 90% acknowledged that marking schemes are frequently relaxed to ensure pass rates. Students' responses further revealed low academic motivation and a strong preference for certification over competence.

The findings empirically confirm Ekeng's (2022) assertion that institutional proliferation has shifted competition in higher education from excellence-driven to survival-driven modes. Enrolment pressure has emerged as a dominant force shaping institutional behaviour, compelling Colleges of Education to sacrifice academic integrity for institutional continuity.

Consistent with Omeje and Mfon (2008), the study demonstrates that once admission standards are weakened, academic rigor becomes difficult to sustain. This

creates a cascading effect that ultimately undermines learning outcomes. In language education, where skill acquisition depends on consistent practice and rigorous assessment, these compromises are particularly damaging.

The poor spoken and written French observed among students is therefore not merely a pedagogical failure but a structural outcome of systemic weaknesses. The findings also reinforce Ndubuisi's assertion (cited in Besong, 2022) that schooling and certification do not necessarily equate to education.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The findings carry significant policy implications.

First, regulatory bodies such as the NCCE and State Ministries of Higher Education must move from expansion-driven approval of institutions to needs-based and capacity-driven authorisation. Institutional licensing should be tied to demonstrable academic infrastructure, staffing strength, and sustainable enrolment projections.

Second, stricter enforcement of admission and assessment standards is imperative. Regulatory agencies must conduct routine audits and impose sanctions on institutions that systematically violate minimum standards.

Third, funding frameworks should prioritise quality assurance indicators rather than raw enrolment numbers to discourage survival-driven compromises. This will enhance the productivity of the teachers.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that the unchecked proliferation of Colleges of Education in Plateau State has significantly undermined educational standards. Competition has shifted from academic excellence to institutional survival, resulting in compromised admission practices, weakened assessment integrity, and poor communicative competence in spoken and written French. Without deliberate regulatory intervention, the foundational goals of higher education will remain unattained.

Based on the findings of this study, the following measures are recommended to address declining educational standards arising from the proliferation of Colleges of Education in Plateau State and Nigeria more broadly.

1. The National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) and States Ministries of Higher Education should adopt a needs-based and capacity-driven framework for approving new Colleges of Education. Institutional approval should be strictly tied to demonstrable academic capacity, qualified staffing, adequate infrastructure, and verifiable societal need, rather than proprietorial interest.
2. Regulatory agencies must strengthen continuous quality assurance and enforcement mechanisms. Routine compliance audits should focus on admissions, assessment practices, and staff adequacy, with clear sanctions,

including programme suspension or closure, for institutions that consistently violate minimum standards.

3. Uniform admission standards must be strictly enforced across all Colleges of Education. Adherence to JAMB and NCCE entry requirements should be non-negotiable, supported by centralised admission monitoring systems to prevent the enrollment of under-qualified candidates.
4. Funding policies should be reoriented from enrolment quantity to educational quality. Government and intervention agencies such as TETFund should link funding eligibility to quality indicators, including staff strength, instructional facilities, and measurable student learning outcomes, particularly in subject-specific competencies like spoken and written French.
5. Colleges of Education should strengthen language-specific pedagogical practices and academic integrity by institutionalising oral proficiency assessments, enforcing transparent grading standards, and promoting student academic responsibility. Priority should be placed on strengthening existing institutions rather than expanding numbers, as sustainable quality is better achieved through consolidation than uncontrolled proliferation.

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