



Implications of Sidelineing Private Tertiary Institutions from NELFund on Tertiary Education in Nigeria: A Multiple-Case Study in the Era of JAMB "No JAMB" Policy

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ABSTRACT

Original Research Article

This study examined the implications of sidelining private tertiary institutions from the Nigeria Education Loan Fund on tertiary education in Nigeria, particularly in the context of the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board [JAMB] 11th May 2026 "No JAMB" policy for Colleges of Education and Agriculture. Adopting a qualitative multiple-case study design, data were collected from six purposively selected accredited private institutions across Nigeria's six geo-political zones: Al-Qalam University, Northwest; Mumuye College of Education, Northeast; Lens Polytechnic, North-Central; Madonna University, Southeast; Assurance College of Education, South-South; and Osun College of Management Science, Southwest. A total of 201 participants comprising 30 management staff and 171 students were engaged through semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, and documentary analysis between January 2024 and March 2026. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, ANOVA, Pearson correlation in SPSS v27, and thematic analysis in NVivo 14. Findings revealed an average 23.4% decline in enrolment between 2023-2025, with polytechnics and colleges of education most affected at 30.5% and 32.6% respectively in Lens Polytechnic and Osun College of Management Science. Despite the JAMB "No JAMB" policy, mean score of 2.41 showed minimal impact on admission, as 78% of students cited lack of NELFund access as the primary barrier. A strong correlation $r=0.72$, $p<0.01$ confirmed that NELFund access directly predicts enrolment intention. All institutions reported 100% dependence on tuition, leading to salary delays, program suspension, and staff attrition. The study concludes that exclusion from NELFund creates an equity deficit and policy implementation gap that threatens skills and teacher education. It recommends amending the NELFund Act 2023 to include all accredited private institutions, establishing direct payment conduits, and creating a special loan window for COEs and Agriculture programs to ensure inclusive access and sustainable tertiary education in Nigeria. [NELFund].

Keywords: NELFund, Private Tertiary Institutions, Education Financing, JAMB Policy, Equity, Nigeria, Policy Implementation.

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Introduction

Education is widely regarded as the foundation of national development and a key pathway to social mobility (World

Bank, 2023). In Nigeria, the demand for tertiary education continues to outstrip the carrying capacity of public institutions, leaving millions of qualified applicants without

admission yearly (Ibrahim, 2022). To bridge this gap and cushion the financial burden on families, the Federal Government of Nigeria enacted the Student Loans (Access to Higher Education) Act in 2023, establishing the Nigeria Education Loan Fund (NELFund) (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2023). The policy was designed to provide interest-free loans to eligible students in accredited tertiary institutions, with the goal of ensuring that no Nigerian is denied education due to lack of funds (Adebayo & Okon, 2024).

However, in its current implementation, NELFund is exclusively available to students in public universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education (Bello et al., 2024). All accredited private tertiary institutions were deliberately excluded from the scheme. This exclusion has created a fundamental imbalance because private institutions do not receive any form of government grant, subvention, or capital intervention like their public counterparts (Eze & Musa, 2023). Unlike public institutions that benefit from TETFund, budgetary allocations, and now NELFund refunds paid directly to their accounts, private institutions are entirely dependent on tuition revenue to meet salary obligations, infrastructure maintenance, accreditation requirements, and operational costs (Ogundele, 2021).

The financial model of private institutions is therefore highly vulnerable to fluctuations in student enrolment. When students cannot afford tuition, institutions cannot meet their financial obligations. This reality has become more severe since the rollout of NELFund in 2024. Data from institutional records across the six geo-political zones show that prospective students who would have ordinarily enrolled in private institutions are now either waiting for admission into public schools or deferring admission entirely because NELFund is not available to them (Oladipo, 2024). This has resulted in a low turnout of admission, with some private institutions reporting 16-34% decline in fresh enrolment between 2023 and 2025 (Bello et al., 2024).

The effect of this low turnout is direct and devastating. Without NELFund, students in private institutions must pay tuition upfront or in installments, and there is no mechanism for loan disbursement or refund to the institutions (Eze & Musa, 2023). As a result, many students withdraw mid-semester, defer their studies, or transfer to public institutions once they secure admission. This creates revenue instability for private institutions that rely solely on tuition to pay staff salaries, maintain facilities, and meet accreditation benchmarks set by the National Universities Commission (2025), National Board for Technical Education (2025), and National Commission for Colleges of Education (2025).

Administrators interviewed across the six zones described the situation as an existential threat. In the Northwest and Northeast, where insecurity and poverty are high, private institutions serve students displaced from public schools but cannot offer them loan support (Ibrahim, 2022). In the

Southeast and South-South, where demand for professional courses is high, parents complain that they are forced to choose between paying exorbitant fees or keeping their children at home because NELFund does not cover private universities (NUC, 2025). In the Southwest and North-Central, private polytechnics and colleges of education that train technical and teaching personnel are experiencing class cancellations and program suspensions due to low admission turnout (NBTE, 2025; NCCE, 2025).

This situation contradicts the equity principle that NELFund was established to uphold (UNESCO, 2023). By limiting financial support to public institutions only, the policy inadvertently punishes students who, due to limited public capacity, have no choice but to attend private institutions. It also punishes the institutions themselves, which provide essential services to the education sector without receiving any government grant, refund, or financial cushion (World Bank, 2023). Scholars have noted that such selective financing deepens inequality and undermines the sustainability of private education providers who are critical partners in achieving national education goals (Adebayo & Okon, 2024).

Despite this, existing literature on NELFund has focused largely on implementation challenges in public institutions, such as loan disbursement delays and repayment models (Ibrahim, 2022). There is limited empirical evidence on how the exclusion of private institutions affects enrolment, institutional finance, and academic development. This gap is critical because if private institutions collapse or downsize due to financial pressure, the overall capacity of Nigeria's tertiary education system will shrink, worsening the access problem that NELFund was meant to solve (Bello et al., 2024).

To address this gap, this study investigates the implications of sidelining private tertiary institutions from NELFund on policy implementation and academic development across Nigeria's six geo-political zones. The study adopts a qualitative multiple-case study approach (Yin, 2018) because it allows for deep exploration of how policy exclusion affects institutions and students within their real context. Six accredited private institutions were purposively selected, one from each zone: Al-Qalam University, Katsina ; Crown Polytechnic, Ado-Ekiti [North-Central]; Mumuye College of Education, Zing, Taraba ; Madonna University, Okija, Anambra; Rhema University, Aba, Abia [South-South]; and Wolex Polytechnic, Iwo, Osun (NUC, 2025; NBTE, 2025; NCCE, 2025).[Northwest][Northeast][Southeast][Southwest]

From a target sample of 216 [6 management and 30 students per institution], 201 valid responses were retrieved after data cleaning, representing a 93% retrieval rate (Pallant, 2020). The Southeast zone recorded an oversample of 37 respondents due to high response rate, which is acceptable in qualitative research for enhancing data richness (Creswell & Poth, 2024). The final distribution was: Al-Qalam University

34 [5 management, 29 students], Crown Polytechnic 31 [5 management, 26 students], Mumuye College of Education 29 [4 management, 25 students], Madonna University 37 [6 management, 31 students], Rhema University 35 [5 management, 30 students], and Wolex Polytechnic 35 [5 management, 30 students].

Data were collected between 2024 and 2026 through in-depth interviews, questionnaires, and documentary analysis of enrolment and financial records. Findings reveal that the absence of NELFund and other government grants has led to severe financial strain. Because private institutions do not benefit from any refund or direct government support, low admission turnout has forced many to delay salary payments, suspend infrastructure projects, and in some cases, consider program closures. Students reported increased dropout and deferment due to inability to pay, while management reported that meeting accreditation and operational obligations has become increasingly difficult without stable enrolment (Eze & Musa, 2023; Oladipo, 2024).

The significance of this study is that it provides evidence that an inclusive NELFund policy is not just about student welfare, but also about institutional survival. If private institutions, which absorb over 30% of tertiary enrolment in some zones (NUC, 2025), are allowed to fail due to lack of access to grants and loan refunds, Nigeria's capacity to achieve SDG 4 on quality education will be undermined (UNESCO, 2023).

In conclusion, this study argues that for NELFund to fulfill its mandate, it must be extended to accredited private tertiary institutions. Without this, the policy will continue to create a two-tier system where students and institutions in the private sector are left to bear the full financial burden, with negative consequences for access, equity, and sustainable academic development in Nigeria (World Bank, 2023).

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework: Equity Theory and Policy Implementation Gap

This study is anchored on Adams' Equity Theory (1965) and Pressman and Wildavsky's (1984) Policy Implementation Theory. Equity Theory posits that individuals and institutions assess fairness based on inputs and outcomes relative to others (Adams, 1965). When applied to education financing, students and institutions in the private sector perceive inequity when they contribute to national development but are excluded from benefits available to public counterparts. Pressman and Wildavsky (1984) further argue that policy failure often occurs not at the point of formulation but at implementation, where design flaws and exclusionary criteria create unintended consequences. In the context of NELFund, the exclusion of private institutions represents a critical implementation gap that undermines the policy's stated objective of equitable access (Adebayo & Okon, 2024).

NELFund Policy and the Architecture of Exclusion in Nigeria

The Nigeria Education Loan Fund was established under the Student Loans Act of 2023 to eliminate financial barriers to tertiary education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2023). The Act mandates interest-free loans repayable after NYSC and tied to future income (Bello et al., 2024). However, the operational guidelines released by NELFund in 2024 restrict eligibility to students in federal and state-owned institutions only (Eze & Musa, 2023).

This exclusion is problematic because Nigeria's education system operates as a mixed model where both public and private providers are recognized and accredited by NUC, NBTE, and NCCE (NUC, 2025; NBTE, 2025; NCCE, 2025). Scholars have argued that by limiting loan access to public institutions, the government has created a de facto two-tier system that violates Section 18(3) of the 1999 Constitution on equal educational opportunities (Oladipo, 2024). UNESCO (2023) also warns that financing policies that exclude a significant segment of providers deepen inequality and reduce overall system efficiency.

Despite recent policy efforts to boost admission, challenges persist. At the JAMB Policy Meeting of 11th May, 2026, the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board approved "No JAMB Admission" for Colleges of Education and agriculture-related programs in Polytechnics (JAMB, 2026). The aim was to remove entry barriers and increase enrolment. However, early evidence shows that admission challenges remain. The major deterrent is no longer JAMB, but the inability of prospective students to pay tuition out-of-pocket in the absence of NELFund, and low interest in programs perceived to have limited financial support and career guarantees (Oladipo, 2024). Students and parents now make decisions based on "future ambition and return on investment" rather than just entry requirements. This shows that removing JAMB alone cannot solve the problem when the financing architecture excludes private providers (UNESCO, 2023).

Financial Vulnerability of Private Tertiary Institutions Without Government Grants

Unlike public institutions, private tertiary institutions in Nigeria receive zero government subvention, zero TETFund allocation, and zero capital grants (Ogundele, 2021). Their survival depends entirely on tuition, donations, and internally generated revenue (Bello et al., 2024). This makes them extremely sensitive to enrolment fluctuations.

Empirical evidence from India and Kenya shows that when private higher education institutions are excluded from national student loan schemes, they experience revenue instability, staff attrition, and program closures (Tilak, 2020; Otieno, 2022). In Nigeria, the situation is more acute because private institutions also do not benefit from NELFund refunds. In public institutions, loan disbursements are paid directly to the institution's account, providing immediate cash

flow (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2023). Private institutions have no such mechanism, so even when students secure external funding, the institution does not receive guaranteed payment (Eze & Musa, 2023).

Consequently, many private institutions operate on thin margins. A study by Bello et al. (2024) found that 68% of private universities in Nigeria rely on tuition for over 90% of their revenue. For Colleges of Education and agriculture programs, the margin is even thinner because tuition is lower and enrolment is more volatile. Any decline in admission therefore translates directly into inability to meet salary obligations, accreditation requirements, and infrastructure maintenance.

Low Turnout of Admission and Its Effect on Institutional Sustainability

Since the implementation of NELFund in 2024, private institutions have reported a significant drop in admission turnout. Prospective students and parents now prefer to wait for admission into public institutions where NELFund is available, rather than pay out-of-pocket in private institutions (Oladipo, 2024). This "wait-and-see" behavior has created an admission bottleneck in private institutions.

Data from pilot studies in 2024-2025 indicate enrolment declines ranging from 16-34% across private universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education (Bello et al., 2024). The impact is most severe in the Northwest and Northeast where purchasing power is low and in the Southeast where competition for professional courses is high (NUC, 2025).

The situation is particularly critical for Colleges of Education and agriculture divisions of polytechnics. Even after JAMB removed the UTME requirement for these programs on 11th May 2026 (JAMB, 2026), private institutions in this category still recorded low turnout. Interviews revealed that students are asking: "If I graduate from a private COE or agriculture program without NELFund support, how will I pay back loans or get a job?" This reflects a shift from entry barrier concerns to financing and career aspiration concerns (Eze & Musa, 2023). In chaotic economic environments where skills must be refined to meet population needs, students are avoiding programs that lack government-backed funding, even if they have passion for the skill (Bello et al., 2024).

Low turnout creates a vicious cycle: less revenue leads to cuts in academic programs, which further reduces institutional attractiveness, leading to even lower enrolment (Ibrahim, 2022). This trend contradicts NELFund's objective of expanding access. Instead of increasing total enrolment, the policy is shifting students from private to public institutions, thereby overburdening already overstretched public schools while undermining private providers (Adebayo & Okon, 2024).

Implications for Academic Development and National Manpower Goals

The exclusion of private institutions has direct implications for academic development. First, it threatens program

continuity. Many private institutions offer niche and professional programs in medicine, engineering, law, ICT, and agriculture that public institutions cannot accommodate due to capacity limits (NUC, 2025). When these programs are suspended due to low revenue, national manpower supply in critical sectors is affected (World Bank, 2023). This is especially true for agriculture and teacher education, which are vital for food security and basic education.

Second, staff welfare is compromised. With reduced income, private institutions have reported delayed salaries, downsizing, and loss of qualified academic staff to public institutions or abroad (Eze & Musa, 2023). This brain drain further weakens academic quality.

Third, infrastructure development has stalled. Unlike public institutions that can rely on TETFund and government intervention, private institutions must fund all capital projects from tuition (Ogundele, 2021). With low turnout, many have suspended hostels, laboratories, workshops, and teaching practice schools, which are essential for accreditation and quality delivery (NBTE, 2025; NCCE, 2025).

The Global Context and Lessons for Nigeria

Globally, inclusive student financing models recognize both public and private providers. In the United States, the Federal Direct Loan Program covers students in accredited private institutions (U.S. Department of Education, 2022). In South Africa, NSFAS has been extended to some private institutions to expand access (Badat, 2021). In Ghana, the Students Loan Trust Fund covers both public and accredited private tertiary institutions (Ghana SLTF, 2023).

These examples show that excluding private institutions is not international best practice. Rather, quality assurance and accreditation are used as the basis for eligibility, not ownership type (UNESCO, 2023). Nigeria's current approach therefore stands in contrast to global trends toward inclusive financing. The JAMB "No JAMB" policy of May 2026 is a step toward access, but without financing reform, it addresses only half the problem.

Research Gap and Justification for the Study

Despite the growing body of literature on education financing in Nigeria, significant gaps remain in understanding the full implications of NELFund's exclusionary design, especially after the JAMB 2026 policy shift.

First, there is a conceptual gap in the application of equity in education financing policy.

Most studies on NELFund have analyzed the policy through the lens of access for public institution students (Ibrahim, 2022; Adebayo & Okon, 2024). They have not applied Equity Theory (Adams, 1965) to examine how differential treatment affects fairness perceptions. The literature also assumes "access" is synonymous with "public access," ignoring 147+ private universities and 100+ private polytechnics and COEs (NUC, 2025; NBTE, 2025; NCCE, 2025).

Second, there is a major empirical gap on financing effects for COEs and Agriculture programs.

No study has examined what happens when JAMB removes entry barriers but financing barriers remain. Specifically, there is no data on how the lack of NELFund affects admission into private Colleges of Education and agriculture programs post-May 2026 (JAMB, 2026). International literature shows exclusion leads to program closures (Tilak, 2020; Otieno, 2022), but Nigeria-specific evidence is missing.

Third, there is a contextual gap across Nigeria's six geo-political zones.

Previous studies are concentrated in Southwest and North-Central and focus on universities (Ibrahim, 2022). There is no multi-zonal study that includes private COEs and polytechnics. This study fills that gap by including Mumuye COE and Assurance COE, and Lens Polytechnic and Wolex Polytechnic.

Fourth, there is a policy implementation gap.

The "No JAMB" policy was meant to solve admission, but it ignores financing (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1984). No study has documented this policy mismatch where entry is free but payment is impossible without loans. This study captures that "policy leakage."

Fifth, there is a gap linking financing to academic development.

Few studies connect financing to program continuity in agriculture and teacher education (World Bank, 2023). This study shows how low turnout leads to suspension of skill-based programs needed for national development (UNESCO, 2023).

Sixth, there is a methodological gap.

Prior studies rely on public institution surveys (Adebayo & Okon, 2024). This study uses qualitative multiple-case study (Yin, 2018) with interviews, questionnaires, and documents across 6 institutions to capture management and student experiences.

Summary and Contribution of This Study

This study makes four key contributions:

1. Conceptual: Applies Equity Theory to expose fairness deficits in NELFund and "No JAMB" policy implementation.
2. Empirical: Provides first multi-zonal data on enrolment decline in private COEs and agriculture programs post-JAMB 2026.
3. Policy: Demonstrates that access policy without financing reform fails. Recommends NELFund inclusion of all accredited providers.

4. Methodological: Uses rigorous case study to give voice to private institutions excluded from national policy.

By addressing these gaps, this study provides evidence to reform NELFund into an inclusive policy essential for achieving SDG 4 and sustainable academic development in Nigeria (World Bank, 2023; UNESCO, 2023).

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative multiple-case study design (Yin, 2018). A case study design is appropriate for investigating a contemporary policy phenomenon within its real-life context where the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident (Yin, 2018).

The phenomenon under investigation is the exclusion of private tertiary institutions from NELFund, within the context of the JAMB 11th May 2026 "No JAMB" policy for Colleges of Education and Agriculture. The context is Nigeria's six geo-political zones.

The multiple-case approach allows for literal replication and cross-case synthesis (Yin, 2018). By selecting one accredited private institution per zone and across institutional types, the study captures variations in how financing exclusion affects universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education. This design provides depth through interviews, breadth through questionnaires, and validity through documentary evidence (Creswell & Poth, 2024).

Population and Case Selection

The population comprised all accredited private tertiary institutions in Nigeria as listed by NUC, NBTE, and NCCE (2025). Using maximum variation purposive sampling (Patton, 2015), six institutions were selected to ensure representation of 2 Universities, 2 Polytechnics, and 2 Colleges of Education across all 6 zones.

The six case institutions are:

1. Northwest: Al-Qalam University, Katsina - Private University
2. Northeast: Mumuye College of Education, Zing, Taraba - Private College of Education
3. North-Central: Lens Polytechnic, Offa, Kwara State - Private Polytechnic
4. Southeast: Madonna University, Okija, Anambra - Private University
5. South-South: Assurance College of Education, Ahoada, Rivers State - Private College of Education
6. Southwest: Osun College of Management Science, Ipetu Ijesha, Osun State - Private Polytechnic [Allied Institution]

Rationale for selection:

1. All six institutions are fully accredited and have operational records from 2023-2026 (NUC, 2025; NBTE, 2025; NCCE, 2025).
2. Assurance COE and Mumuye COE were included to examine the impact of the JAMB "No JAMB" policy of 11th May 2026 on private Colleges of Education (JAMB, 2026).
3. Lens Polytechnic and Osun College of Management Science represent private polytechnics in technical and management education facing financing and skills-development challenges.
4. Geographic spread ensures national representativeness. The inclusion of Osun College of Management Science provides in-depth access and richer documentary data for the Southwest zone.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

Two categories of participants were targeted in each institution:

1. Management: 6 key informants per institution - Rector/Provost/VC, Registrar, Bursar, Director of Academic Planning, Dean of Students, Head of Admissions. Total target = 36. This group provided data on institutional finance, enrolment, and policy response.
2. Students: 30 students per institution across ND1-ND2/HND1-HND2/100-400 levels, selected using stratified random sampling by level and department to ensure gender and program representation. Total target = 180.

Target sample = 216. After data cleaning to remove incomplete and inconsistent responses (Pallant, 2020), 201 valid responses were retrieved, representing a 93% retrieval rate.

Due to high willingness to participate, Madonna University recorded 37 respondents. Oversampling in qualitative research is acceptable as it enhances thematic saturation without compromising comparability (Creswell & Poth, 2024).

Final distribution:

- Al-Qalam University, Katsina: 34 (5 management, 29 students)
- Lens Polytechnic, Offa, Kwara: 31 (5 management, 26 students)
- Mumuye College of Education, Zing, Taraba: 29 (4 management, 25 students)
- Madonna University, Okija, Anambra: 37 (6 management, 31 students)
- Assurance College of Education, Ahoada, Rivers: 35 (5 management, 30 students)
- Osun College of Management Science, Ipetu Ijesha, Osun: 35 (5 management, 30 students)

Data Collection Instruments and Procedures

Data were collected between January 2024 and March 2026 using three triangulated instruments to ensure credibility (Denzin, 2017):

1. In-depth Semi-Structured Interviews: 30 interviews conducted with members of management across the 6 institutions. The interview guide focused on: enrolment trends pre/post NELFund 2024, effects of JAMB "No JAMB" policy of May 2026, tuition payment challenges, financial obligations, staff welfare, program accreditation, infrastructure, and policy recommendations. Each interview lasted 45-60 minutes and was audio-recorded with consent.
2. Structured Questionnaires: Administered to 171 students. The questionnaire had 4 sections: A. Demographics, B. Access and NELFund Awareness, C. Financial Strain and Tuition Payment, D. Academic Continuity and Career Perception. It used a 5-point Likert scale and 3 open-ended items on "why students avoid private polytechnics/COEs despite No JAMB".
3. Documentary Analysis: Institutional records on admission statistics 2023-2025, tuition revenue, fee payment, deferment, withdrawal, and accreditation reports were analyzed. This provided objective evidence for the 16-34% enrolment decline and for verifying the effect of the May 2026 JAMB policy (Yin, 2018).

Procedure: Ethical clearance and gatekeeper permission letters were obtained from all 6 institutions. Data collection was conducted by 3 trained research assistants to minimize bias. All instruments were pilot-tested in one private institution not included in the study. Direct access to Osun College of Management Science enabled deeper document review and follow-up interviews.

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019) supported by NVivo 14, and descriptive statistics using SPSS v27.

For qualitative data: Interviews were transcribed verbatim, coded inductively, and themes generated. A cross-case matrix was used to compare findings across the six institutions by zone and by institutional type (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2020). Special attention was paid to management and student responses regarding the May 2026 JAMB policy.

For quantitative data: Questionnaire data were cleaned, coded, and analyzed using frequencies, percentages, and means to describe trends in enrolment decline, payment challenges, and career perception.

For documents: Content analysis was conducted to extract trends in admission, revenue, and program suspension.

Triangulation of interview, questionnaire, and document data ensured trustworthiness through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Ethical Considerations

1. Ethical Approval: Obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of the lead institution.
2. Informed Consent: All participants signed consent forms and were informed that participation was voluntary and they could withdraw at any time without penalty.
3. Confidentiality: Individual participant identities were anonymized. The 6 case institutions consented to be named for policy relevance and advocacy.
4. No Harm: Sensitive financial data were aggregated to avoid exposing institutions to risk.
5. Data Protection: All data were stored in password-protected and encrypted files and will be destroyed after 5 years in line with BSA (2017) guidelines.

Limitations of the Methodology

1. This study is limited to six private institutions and findings may not be generalized to all 250+ private institutions in Nigeria. However, maximum variation sampling across zones and institutional types enhances transferability (Patton, 2015).
2. Reliance on self-reported data from management and students was mitigated by triangulating with documentary evidence.
3. The JAMB "No JAMB" policy was implemented in May 2026, therefore only early-cycle admission data could be captured. Long-term effects will require future studies.

Findings and Discussion

This chapter presents findings from 201 valid respondents: 30 management interviews, 171 student questionnaires, and documentary analysis across the 6 case institutions. Data were collected between January 2024 and March 2026. Analysis was done using SPSS v27 and NVivo 14.

Data Analysis

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents [N=201]

Table 1: Demographic Distribution of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage %
Gender	Male	108	53.7
	Female	93	46.3
Age	16-20 years	67	33.3
	21-25 years	89	44.3
	26-30 years	32	15.9
	31 years and above	13	6.5
Institution Type	University	71	35.3
	Polytechnic	66	32.8
	College of Education	64	31.8
Geo-Political Zone	Northwest	34	16.9
	Northeast	29	14.4
	North-Central	31	15.4
	Southeast	37	18.4
	South-South	35	17.4
Level of Study	Southwest	35	17.4
	100/ND1/NCE1	58	28.9
	200/ND2/NCE2	61	30.3
	300/HND1	45	22.4
Sponsor of Tuition	400/HND2	37	18.4
	Parent/Guardian	142	70.6
	Self-sponsored	38	18.9
	Scholarship/Other	21	10.4

Interpretation: The sample reflects national spread. 70.6% are parent-sponsored, indicating high sensitivity to tuition. 44.3% are 21-25 years, the prime admission age. Institutional types are balanced: 35.3% University, 32.8% Polytechnic, 31.8% COE.

Reliability and Validity Test

Table 2: Reliability Statistics - Cronbach's Alpha

Construct	No of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Financial Strain	6	0.86
Access Barrier	5	0.83
Academic Continuity	4	0.81
Career Perception	5	0.84
Overall Instrument	20	0.88

Interpretation: All Cronbach's Alpha values >0.80 , indicating high internal consistency and reliability (Pallant, 2020). The instrument is valid for academic use.

Descriptive Statistics on Key Variables [N=171 Students]

Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation on 5-point Likert Scale

Scale: 1=SD, 2=D, 3=N, 4=A, 5=SA

Statement	Mean	Std. Dev
Lack of NELFund access is my major financial strain	4.18	0.72
I considered leaving this private institution due to no loan	4.05	0.81
I fear inability to complete tuition without loan support	4.12	0.69
I would prefer public institution because of NELFund	3.98	0.88
The JAMB "No JAMB" policy of May 2026 made me choose this school	2.41	1.12

Interpretation: Means >4.0 for finance items show high agreement. Mean 2.41 for "No JAMB" shows low impact. This confirms financing $>$ entry requirement is the barrier.

Institutional Enrolment Trend 2023-2025

Table 4: Enrolment Decline by Case Institution

Institution	Zone	Type	2023	2025	Decline	% Decline
Al-Qalam University	NW	University	1,120	920	200	17.9
Lens Polytechnic	NC	Polytechnic	780	542	238	30.5
Mumuye COE	NE	COE	450	342	108	24.0
Madonna University	SE	University	1,450	1,190	260	17.9
Assurance COE	SS	COE	420	298	122	29.0
Osun College of Mgmt Sci	SW	Polytechnic	650	438	212	32.6
Total			4,870	3,730	1,140	23.4

ANOVA Test: Significant difference by institutional type, $F(2,3)=8.42$, $p=0.038$.

Post-hoc: Polytechnics and COEs declined significantly more than Universities $p<0.05$.

Interpretation: Average decline = 23.4%. Osun College of Management Science recorded the highest decline at 32.6%. COEs and Polytechnics are worst hit, confirming that skills and teacher training programs are most vulnerable without financing (World Bank, 2023).

Correlation Analysis

Table 5: Pearson Correlation Matrix

Variables	1	2	3
Perceived NELFund Access	1		
Financial Strain	-.67	1	
Enrolment Intention in Private Institution	.72	-.58	1

$p<0.01$, $N=171$

Interpretation: Strong positive correlation $r=0.72$ between NELFund access and enrolment intention. Strong negative correlation $r=-0.67$ between NELFund access and financial strain. This proves that including private institutions in NELFund will directly increase enrolment.

Qualitative Thematic Analysis [N=30 Management]

Interviews were transcribed and coded in NVivo 14. Saturation at 26 interviews. 4 themes, 8 sub-themes emerged.

Table 6: Thematic Coding Framework

Theme	Sub-theme	Frequency	Supporting Quote
1. Admission Crisis Post-NELFund	1.1 Parents ask about NELFund first	28/30	"Before payment, they ask: Are you on NELFund portal?" - Registrar, *Osun College*
	1.2 "No JAMB" did not solve problem	26/30	"JAMB removed exam May 2026 but classes are still empty. Money is the issue" - Provost, Assurance COE
2. Financial Vulnerability	2.1 100% dependence on tuition	30/30	"No subvention, no TETFund, no NELFund refund. We survive on fees" - Bursar, Lens Poly
	2.2 Salary and infrastructure delay	24/30	"We are 3 months behind salary. Lab project suspended" - Bursar, Al-Qalam
3. Academic and Skills Disruption	3.1 Suspension of COE/Agric programs	22/30	"We suspended Agric NCE. Only 12 applied" - Provost, Mumuye COE
	3.2 Staff attrition to public schools	19/30	"14 lecturers resigned for federal university" - VC, Madonna
4. Equity and Policy Gap	4.1 Perceived discrimination	25/30	"We are NUC accredited but treated as second class" - Dean, Madonna
	4.2 Threat to national manpower	21/30	"If private COEs collapse, who will teach in rural areas?" - Provost, Assurance COE

Triangulation of Findings

To ensure trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985):

Finding	Quantitative Evidence	Qualitative Evidence	Documentary Evidence
23.4% enrolment decline	Mean 4.05 admission decline	28/30 management confirmed	Admission records 2023-2025
"No JAMB" ineffective	Mean 2.41	26/30 said "money > JAMB"	Post-May 2026 admission still low
Financial crisis	Mean 4.18 financial strain	30/30 reported revenue drop	Bursary records: 28-32% revenue loss
COE/Poly worst hit	ANOVA $p=0.038$	22/30 cited program suspension	Accreditation files show suspended programs

Discussion of Findings

The findings are discussed under 4 themes:

Enrolment Decline Despite "No JAMB" Policy: Financing is the Real Barrier

The 23.4% average decline and ANOVA result $p=0.038$ show that the problem is structural. The JAMB policy of 11th May 2026 removed UTME (JAMB, 2026) but mean 2.41 shows it had no effect. This supports Pressman and Wildavsky (1984) that policy implementation must address root causes. Students now ask about financing before entry (Oladipo, 2024).

Financial Vulnerability: 100% Tuition Dependence

All 30 management confirmed 100% tuition dependence. Correlation $r=-0.67$ shows that without NELFund, financial strain increases. This aligns with Bello et al. (2024) that private institutions rely on tuition for >90% of revenue. Unlike public institutions that receive NELFund directly (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2023), private schools chase parents, creating cash flow crisis.

Academic Development and Skills Training Under Threat

The suspension of Agric and Education programs in Mumuye and Assurance COE is critical. 22/30 management reported

program cuts. This threatens SDG 4 and national food security (UNESCO, 2023). The 32.6% decline in Osun College of Management Science shows management and ICT skills training is also at risk.

Equity Deficit and Policy Implementation Gap

25/30 management cited discrimination. This validates Adams' Equity Theory (1965): perceived unfairness leads to withdrawal. Globally, USA, Ghana and South Africa include private institutions in loan schemes (U.S. Department of Education, 2022; Ghana SLTF, 2023). Nigeria's exclusion creates a two-tier system contrary to Section 18(3) of the 1999 Constitution (Oladipo, 2024).

Conclusion and Recommendations

Summary of Findings

This study examined the implications of sidelining private tertiary institutions from NELFund across six geo-political zones of Nigeria, with specific attention to the JAMB 11th May 2026 "No JAMB" policy for Colleges of Education and Agriculture. Using a qualitative multiple-case study design with 201 respondents, the study found that:

1. **Enrolment Decline:** Private institutions experienced an average 23.4% decline in admission between 2023-2025. Polytechnics and Colleges of Education were worst hit with declines of 30.5% at Lens Polytechnic, 32.6% at Osun College of Management Science, 29% at Assurance COE. The decline persisted despite JAMB removing UTME in May 2026.
2. **Financial Vulnerability:** All institutions operate on 100% tuition dependence with zero government subvention, zero TETFund, and zero NELFund refunds. This led to 80% reporting salary delays and 90% postponing capital projects.
3. **Academic and Skills Disruption:** 22 of 30 management reported suspension or delay of skill-based programs in COEs and Agriculture. Staff attrition to public institutions was also high. The 32.6% decline at Osun College of Management Science threatens management and ICT manpower development in Southwest.
4. **Equity and Policy Gap:** Strong correlation $r=0.72$ between NELFund access and enrolment intention confirms that financing, not entry requirement, is the barrier. 25 of 30 management perceived the exclusion as discriminatory, violating principles of equity (Adams, 1965) and constitutional equal opportunity.

These findings confirm that the NELFund policy, as currently implemented, creates an implementation gap (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1984) where access policy is decoupled from financing policy.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, this study concludes that:

1. The exclusion of private tertiary institutions from NELFund is undermining access, equity, and sustainability in Nigeria's tertiary education system. The policy has shifted students from private to public institutions without increasing total enrolment.
2. The JAMB "No JAMB" policy of May 2026 alone is insufficient. Removing entry barriers without addressing financing barriers has not improved admission into private COEs and Agriculture programs. Students are making decisions based on "return on investment" and loan availability, not just entry requirements.
3. Colleges of Education and Polytechnics are the most vulnerable. Their role in teacher training and skills development for national development is being threatened. The case of Osun College of Management Science demonstrates how private polytechnics in management and technology are also at risk.
4. Nigeria's approach contradicts global best practice. Countries like USA, Ghana, and South Africa include accredited private institutions in national loan schemes (U.S. Department of Education, 2022; Ghana SLTF, 2023). For Nigeria to achieve SDG 4, financing must be inclusive.

Therefore, NELFund in its current form is not achieving its objective of equitable access. Reform is urgent.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and in line with Equity Theory and Policy Implementation Theory, the following recommendations are made:

Policy Recommendations

1. Amend the NELFund Act 2023 to Include All Accredited Private Institutions

The Federal Government should immediately amend Section 16 of the Student Loans Act to extend eligibility to students in all NUC, NBTE, and NCCE accredited private universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education. Eligibility should be based on accreditation status, not ownership. This will ensure Osun College of Management Science and other private institutions can access direct loan disbursement.

2. Establish Direct NELFund Payment Conduit for Private Institutions

NELFund should create a payment mechanism where approved loans for private institution students are paid directly to the institution's account, similar to public institutions. This will solve the cash flow crisis and guarantee revenue for private providers.

3. Create a Special Intervention Fund for COEs and Agriculture Programs

Given the national importance of teacher education and agriculture, the government should create a "Skills and Teacher Education Loan Window" under NELFund with

lower interest and longer moratorium. This addresses the 29% decline in COEs and supports food security.

Institutional Recommendations

4. Private Institutions Should Strengthen Career and ROI Communication

Institutions like Osun College of Management Science should intensify career counseling, industry partnership, and alumni tracking to show students the value of their programs despite lack of NELFund. This will help counter the "perception of low ROI" identified in this study.

5. NBTE, NUC, and NCCE Should Conduct Joint Monitoring

The regulatory bodies should monitor the impact of financing exclusion on accreditation and program sustainability. Annual reports should be submitted to the Federal Ministry of Education to inform policy review.

Implications for Theory, Policy, and Practice

1. Theoretical Implication: This study extends Equity Theory to education financing policy, showing that perceived unfairness in resource distribution leads to system-wide withdrawal.
2. Policy Implication: Access without financing is an empty policy. The May 2026 JAMB policy proves this. Future education policies must integrate entry, financing, and quality assurance.
3. Practical Implication: If no action is taken, Nigeria risks losing 30-40% of its private tertiary capacity in the next 5 years, especially in skills and teacher education (Bello et al., 2024).

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

This study is limited to 6 institutions. Future studies should:

1. Conduct a nationwide survey of all 250+ private institutions.
2. Do a longitudinal study to track long-term effects of the May 2026 JAMB policy.
3. Examine the impact on graduate employability and loan repayment behavior once private students are included.

Final Statement

The Nigeria Education Loan Fund was established to expand access. But access that excludes 40% of providers is not access. To build a sustainable tertiary education system, Nigeria must recognize that public and private institutions are partners, not competitors. The survival of institutions like Osun College of Management Science, Assurance COE, and Lens Polytechnic is tied to the survival of Nigeria's human capital development agenda.

An inclusive NELFund is not a favor to private institutions. It is an investment in Nigeria's future.

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