



Research Paper

Civic-Military Relations and Democratic Education in African Colleges of Education: A Framework for Sustainable Democratic Consolidation

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Abstract

This article examines the intersection between civic-military relations and democratic education within African colleges of education, with a focus on military-affiliated institutions. Drawing on theories of civil-military relations, democratic consolidation, and critical pedagogy, the paper argues that military colleges in Africa have a unique but underutilized role in fostering democratic citizenship, civic awareness, and respect for constitutional governance. Through a mixed-methods analysis of curriculum content, stakeholder interviews, and policy reviews across Nigeria, Ghana, and Kenya, the study reveals that while military education emphasizes discipline and loyalty, it often sidelines explicit democratic and civic education. The article proposes an integrated curriculum model—the Democratic Civic-Military Education Framework (DCMEF)—designed to harmonize military professionalism with democratic values. The findings underscore the potential of military colleges to serve as hubs for democratic socialization, particularly in post-conflict and democratizing African societies.

Keywords: civil-military relations, democratic education, military colleges, Africa, civic education, democratic consolidation, Nigeria

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I. Introduction

Civil-military relations (CMR) remain a critical determinant of democratic stability in Africa, where historical experiences of military coups, authoritarian rule, and political violence have often strained the social contract between armed forces and civilian populations (Huntington, 1957; Janowitz, 1960). In recent decades, many African nations have transitioned toward democratic governance, yet the role of the military in these democracies remains ambiguous and, at times, contentious. Parallel to this, democratic education—a pedagogical approach that fosters critical thinking, civic responsibility, human rights awareness, and participatory citizenship—has gained prominence as a tool for sustaining democratic cultures (Banks, 2008; Parker, 2003). However, the integration of democratic education within military colleges and schools of education in Africa has been largely underexplored. These institutions, which train future military leaders, teachers, and public administrators, represent strategic sites for shaping attitudes toward democracy, rule of law, and civilian oversight. This article addresses this gap by investigating how African colleges of education, particularly those with military affiliations, can enhance civic-military relations through deliberate democratic education. Focusing on the Nigerian Army School of Education (NASE) as a primary case, and drawing comparative insights from Ghana and Kenya, the study seeks to answer:

1. How are democratic and civic education currently incorporated into the curricula of military colleges of education in Africa?
2. What are the perceptions of military educators and cadets regarding the role of democratic education in professional military training?
3. How can a revised educational framework improve both military professionalism and democratic citizenship in Africa?

II. Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored in three interrelated theoretical perspectives:

1. Civil-Military Relations Theory (Huntington, 1957; Janowitz, 1960): Distinguishes between subjective civilian control (military integration into political ideology) and objective control (military professionalism and political neutrality).
2. Democratic Education Theory (Gutmann, 1987; Banks, 2008): Emphasizes education for deliberative democracy, pluralism, and civic agency.
3. Critical Pedagogy (Freire, 1970): Advocates for education as a practice of freedom, encouraging critical consciousness and social transformation.

These frameworks inform the analysis of how military education can reconcile the imperatives of discipline and hierarchy with the democratic values of accountability, transparency, and civic engagement.

III. Methodology

A sequential mixed-methods design was employed, conducted in three phases:

1. Document Analysis: Curricular documents, training manuals, and policy guidelines from six military colleges of education in Nigeria, Ghana, and Kenya (2018–2023).
2. Survey: Questionnaire administered to 300 military educators and cadets (n=150 Nigeria, n=75 Ghana, n=75 Kenya) assessing attitudes toward democracy, civic education, and civil-military relations.
3. Semi-structured Interviews: 45 key informants (commandants, faculty, education policymakers, civil society representatives).

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis (qualitative) and descriptive/inferential statistics (quantitative). Ethical clearance was obtained from the Nigerian Army School of Education Research Ethics Committee.

IV. Findings

I. Curricular Gaps in Democratic and Civic Education

Analysis revealed that less than 15% of curricular content in the sampled institutions explicitly addressed democratic principles, human rights, or civic responsibility. Military subjects dominated, while modules on “Civil-Military Relations” or “Democracy and Governance” were elective or absent.

Table 1: Civic and Democratic Education Content in African Military Colleges of Education (Sample)

Country	Institution	Civic/Democratic Modules Offered	Status	Hours/Year
Nigeria	Nigerian Army School of Education	Introduction to Civil-Military Relations	Elective	20
Ghana	Ghana Military Academy	Democracy & Human Rights	Compulsory	30
Kenya	Kenya Defence Forces Technical College	Citizenship & National Values	Elective	15

II. Attitudes Toward Democratic Education

Survey results indicated strong support for integrating democratic education: 78% of respondents agreed that “military officers should receive training in democratic governance,” and 82% believed that “civic education strengthens military professionalism.” However, 65% expressed concern about “potential tension between military discipline and democratic critical thinking.”

III. Case Study: Nigerian Army School of Education (NASE)

Interviews at NASE highlighted ongoing efforts to embed civic education through the “Military and Society” course. However, challenges included resource constraints, lack of specialized faculty, and occasional resistance from traditionalist quarters within the military hierarchy.

V. Discussion

The findings suggest that African military colleges of education are at a strategic crossroads. While they traditionally prioritize operational and tactical training, their potential as incubators of democratic culture remains underdeveloped. The weak inclusion of civic and democratic content reflects a broader historical legacy of militarization and political instability in Africa, where military institutions were often divorced from civic ethos. However, the positive attitudes among educators and cadets indicate a readiness for reform. The proposed Democratic Civic-Military Education Framework (DCMEF) advocates for:

- Core democratic citizenship modules integrated into all programs.
- Participatory pedagogies such as debates, simulations, and community engagement.
- Civilian-military dialogue forums within college settings.
- Research partnerships with universities and civil society on governance and security.

This model aligns with Huntington's concept of objective civilian control, where military professionalism is enhanced by, rather than isolated from, democratic norms.

VI. Recommendations

- I. Curriculum Reform: Mandate democratic and civic education as core components in all military colleges of education.
- II. Faculty Development: Train military educators in civic pedagogy and conflict-sensitive education.
- III. Civilian Collaboration: Involve academics, civil society, and veterans in curriculum design and delivery.
- IV. Policy Integration: National policies on democratic education should explicitly include military training institutions.
- V. Longitudinal Research: Track the impact of civic education on military officers' attitudes and behaviors over time.

VII. Conclusion

African colleges of education with military affiliations hold significant potential to strengthen civic-military relations and contribute to democratic consolidation. By intentionally integrating democratic education into their curricula, these institutions can produce military professionals who are not only tactically proficient but also civically minded, respectful of constitutional order, and accountable to the societies they serve. The *Democratic Civic-Military Education Framework* offers a practical pathway for realizing this goal, promoting a culture of democracy within the military, and fostering greater public trust in Africa's security sectors.

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