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Exploring Pricing Capability as an Instrument for Enhancing Student Enrolment and Retention in Private Secondary Schools in Kebbi State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Private schools provide access to education and contribute to national economy. The economic instability that increases their cost of operation and diminishes parent's purchasing power, imposed obligation to effectively set and manage fees. However, poor pricing capability due to imposition of unaffordable fees could render many private schools ineffective, reflected in low enrolment and poor retention. This study, therefore, explored pricing capability as a strategic resource for student enrolment and retention in private secondary schools in Kebbi State, Nigeria. The objectives were to: (i) examine pricing capability of private schools; and (ii) determine how it influences student enrolment and retention. The study employed a qualitative phenomenological design, involving 12 participants (6 proprietors and 6 principals) purposively selected from a population of 160. Data were collected using a structured interview guide, whose face validity and content validity were established by experts. The trustworthiness of the data was also ensured. The findings revealed pricing capability in private secondary schools grouped into five themes; theme one: price bundling capability, theme two: price adaptive capability, theme three: price information capability, theme four: price negotiation capability, and theme five: price formation capability. This implies that private schools have what it takes to set and manage fees. The results further showed that these five identified pricing capabilities enhance student enrolment and retention. This implies that schools with strong pricing capabilities are better positioned to attract new students and retain existing ones. The study concluded that pricing capability is a strategic resource that enables private secondary schools to balance affordability with financial sustainability, thereby improving enrolment and retention. It was recommended that proprietors of private secondary schools should strengthen their pricing capabilities through effective fee bundling, adaptive pricing, informed decision-making, stakeholder negotiation, and structured fee formation processes.

Keywords: pricing capability, enrolment, retention, private schools, Kebbi State, Nigeria

1 Introduction

Private secondary schools in North-West Nigeria operate in a competitive and economically unstable environment where school enrolment and student retention are influenced by both service quality and pricing strategies. Pricing capability, the ability of an institution to effectively develop, communicate, and manage pricing (Muhammad et al., 2025), has become a vital tool for educational managers to influence parental choices and sustain school operations. Pricing capability goes beyond fee setting; it involves the ability to manage fees (price) using data to support pricing decisions (Skarmeas et al., 2016). In the Nigerian context, particularly in Kebbi State, where household income disparities are significant, pricing capability could bridge the gap between educational access and financial sustainability. Despite the proliferation of private schools in Nigeria, particularly in Kebbi State, challenges such as economic instability and rising operational costs have caused many private schools to experience dwindling enrolment and high dropout rates (Härmä, 2021; Egbebi & Wakili, 2020). Consequently, many private schools face low enrolment and high student attrition. This situation suggests a possible mismatch between the fees charged by schools and parents' perceived affordability. Private schools often adopt appropriate pricing orientation when setting school fees by aligning fees with the perceived value of educational services, costs incurred in service delivery, and competitive conditions (Muhammad et al., 2025; Perearau & Ekankumo, 2025). However, although pricing orientation enables private schools to make justifiable fee decisions that may enhance parents' willingness to pay and, consequently, improve enrolment and retention (Perearau & Ekankumo, 2025; Muhammad et al., 2025; Wakkala et

al., 2025), it may not adequately account for parents' ability to pay, which is influenced by local economic conditions. This limitation highlights the need for pricing capability to enable private schools to adapt their pricing practices to prevailing economic conditions and sustain enrolment and retention over the long term. Therefore, there is a need to assess the pricing capability of private schools as a strategic tool for enhancing student enrolment and retention. Understanding how pricing capability affects student enrolment and retention could provide useful strategic guidance to private school managers in the state.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Private secondary schools in Nigeria, particularly in Kebbi State, operate in a highly competitive and economically volatile environment. Amidst rising operational costs, declining household incomes, and increasing demand for affordable quality education, many of these schools struggle to maintain sustainable enrolment and retention rates (Nnenna & Ejiorfor, 2024). A key contributing factor to this challenge could be lack of strategic pricing capability, the ability to design, communicate, and adjust tuition fees in ways that balance financial viability with parents' willingness and ability to pay. Empirical evidence suggests that pricing decisions in many private schools are often arbitrary (Perearau & Ekankumo, 2025). As a result, some schools lose prospective students due to unaffordable pricing structures, while others suffer financial instability from underpriced services (Muhammad et al., 2025). Additionally, inflexible or poorly communicated fee policies often lead to increased dropout rates and strained relationships with stakeholders (Muhammad et al., 2025). Despite the scholarly claim that pricing is one of the most effectiveness levers available to any profit oriented organizations (Kankam-Kwarteng et al., 2019), including private educational institutions (Muritala et al., 2019; Olaoye et al., 2018), there is limited research on how pricing capability enhances both student enrolment and retention in private secondary schools in Kebbi State, which are significant indicators of effective private schools (Muhammad et al., 2025). This gap necessitates an in-depth investigation into how private schools can leverage pricing capability as a strategic asset to attract new students and retain existing ones, while ensuring long-term institutional effectiveness.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

To examine how pricing capability can enhance student enrolment and retention in private secondary schools in Kebbi State.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the pricing capability of private secondary schools in Kebbi State, Nigeria
2. To explore the influence of pricing capability on students enrolment and retention in private secondary schools in Kebbi State, Nigeria

1.4 Research Questions

1. What is the pricing capability of private secondary schools in Kebbi State, Nigeria?
2. How does pricing capability influence student enrolment and retention in private secondary schools in Kebbi State, Nigeria?

2 Literature Review/Theoretical Framework

2.1 Theoretical Review

This study is anchored on the resource based view (RBV) which was originally proposed by Wernerfelt (1984), and advanced by Barney (1991). The RBV posits that an organization's long-term competitive advantage is primarily determined by its internal resources and capabilities, rather than solely by external market forces (Barney (1991). For a resource to offer sustainable competitive advantage, it must be strategic by meeting four critical criteria: it must be valuable, rare, and difficult to imitate and non-substitutable (Barney, 1991). Pricing capability could be conceptualized as one such strategic resource. It includes an institution's ability to systematically develop, communicate, and manage tuition fees and

related financial decisions in alignment with market conditions, parental expectations, and institutional goals (Muhammad et al., 2025).

Pricing capability involves not only technical pricing skills, but also the integration of adaptive, information-based, and negotiation-driven processes that align fee structures with value propositions and stakeholder needs (Liozu & Hinterhuber, 2013). In private education sector, particularly in regions like North-Western Nigeria, where economic conditions and market competition are highly dynamic, pricing capability could serve as a distinctive competence. Schools that are able to flexibly adjust fees, offer transparent pricing packages, understand local demand patterns, and respond to parental affordability concerns are more likely to attract new students, retain existing ones and ensure financial sustainability (Wakkala et al., 2025).

2.2 Conceptual Review

2.2.1 Pricing Capability

Pricing capability is a crucial factor in setting the appropriate prices for private school services. This is because, it has been found in the literature to strongly influence the financial performance of business organizations (Aprilio & Wardhana, 2025; Skarmeas et al., 2016; Liozu & Hinterhuber, 2013; Afzal, 2009). Pricing Capability is the ability of an organisation to set and mange price for optimal revenue (Skarmeas, et al., 2016). In the context of private education, pricing capability can be defined as the ability of private schools to set and mange school fees. Muhammad et al. (2025) measured pricing capability in the private school sector using three dimensions: price adaptive capability, price information capability, and price negotiation capability. These dimensions were adapted from the existing literature, which has largely focused on commercial corporate settings. Similarly, Liozu and Hinterhuber (2013) conceptualised pricing capability as a unidimensional construct measured using a multi-item scale, with a focus on manufacturing, retail, and service sectors. Afzal (2009) also examined pricing capability as a dimension of marketing capability within the corporate sector. In the same vein, Skarmeas et al. (2016) measured pricing capability as a unidimensional construct using a four-item scale. In contrast, Uripia et al. (2021) examined pricing capability from the perspective of price bundling capability, focusing on small and medium-sized enterprises in the food and restaurant sectors.

The reviewed literature therefore indicates that pricing capability has been conceptualised and measured in different ways depending on the context and nature of the organisation under investigation. In particular, it has been operationalised in terms of price adaptive, price information, and price negotiation capabilities (Muhammad et al., 2025); price bundling capability (Uripia et al., 2021); and as a unidimensional construct (Liozu & Hinterhuber, 2013; Skarmeas et al., 2016). These variations suggest that there is no universally applicable approach to measuring pricing capability across organisational contexts. Rather, the dimensions used to operationalise the construct should reflect the specific characteristics, activities, and operating environment of the organisation being studied. In the context of private secondary schools, price bundling capability refers to the ability of a school to package two or more complementary educational services and offer them at a combined fee that is more attractive than the cost of purchasing the services separately (Uripia et al., 2021). Such a strategy can enable private schools to enhance the attractiveness of their educational offerings, encourage student enrolment, and strengthen parent loyalty. Price adaptive capability refers to the ability of a private school to adjust its fees promptly in response to changes in educational needs, competitors' pricing strategies, and prevailing economic conditions (Muhammad et al., 2025). Price information capability denotes the ability of a private school to obtain, analyse, and utilise relevant information to make appropriate decisions regarding the determination and management of school fees (Muhammad et al., 2025). Price negotiation capability, on the other hand, refers to the ability of a private school to engage relevant stakeholders in discussions and reach mutually acceptable agreements concerning the fees charged for its educational services (Muhammad et al., 2025).

The differences in the measurement of pricing capability across previous studies can therefore be attributed largely to variations in organisational context and the specific circumstances in which the construct is examined. This perspective is consistent with the argument that the dimensions and measures used to assess pricing capability should be developed or adapted to reflect the particular situation of the organisation under investigation (Afzal, 2009; Uripia et al., 2021). Consequently, adopting measures developed exclusively within commercial, manufacturing, retail, or other business contexts may not fully capture the nature of pricing capability in private secondary schools. Based on this consideration, the present study sought to examine the dimensions that constitute pricing capability within the context of private secondary schools, taking into account the distinctive nature of school operations and the socio-cultural and economic realities of Northwestern Nigeria, particularly Kebbi State. The study further sought to determine how these pricing capabilities

contribute to student enrolment and retention. This context-specific approach is expected to provide a more comprehensive understanding of pricing capability as a strategic resource for enhancing the effectiveness and sustainability of private secondary schools.

2.2.2 Students' Enrollment

Student enrolment refers to the process of finding and attracting potential students profitable to the school (Atolagbe et al., 2019). It is also seen as attracting students who were not enrolled the previous sessions (Uchendu et al., 2015). In order to attract new students, private schools need to consider which prospective parents to target, how to communicate with them and what educational experiences to offer them. Attracting new students is an objective pursued by any private school, which in the actual competitive environment, is almost inevitably faced with a phenomenon of customer migration (Olaoye et al., 2018).

2.2.3 Student Retention

A strategy of any successful private school today is not only developing cost-effective and highly targeted ways to reach out the potential parents, but also more about keeping the existing ones engaged in the school (Atolagbe et al., 2019). A retention strategy in any business organization, including private schools, aims to maintain relationships with a highest proportion of the current student base by decreasing their migration rate (Olaoye et al., 2018). Student retention refers to the actions that are done in order to keep the customer relationship alive and retain the profitability of the students (Muritala et al., 2025). Muritala et al., (2019) defined retention as the maintenance of continuous school-business relationships with parents over a long-term. There are three segments in customer retention put forward by Peppers and Rogers (2016). These are retaining profitability, winning-backs and diminishing unprofitability. These are the actions towards a valuable student base which is correlating with the success of a private school (Muhammad et al., 2025).

2.3 Empirical Review

Several studies have explored the effects of pricing capability on performance of organizations in various settings. For example, Muhammad et al. (2025) carried out a study to examine how pricing capability can improve the effectiveness of private schools in North-west, Nigeria. Using quantitative approach, data was collected using questionnaires, and analyzed using regression. Results showed that pricing capability influences private school effectiveness. This implies that private schools with strong ability to manage school fees can enhance their effectiveness. Likewise, Olaoye et al. (2018) conducted a study to examine how pricing policy affects student enrolment in public universities in South-west, Nigeria. The study employed a quantitative approach, with data gathered through questionnaire administration. Data analysis was carried out using regression. The results showed that enrolment in private universities is significantly influenced by pricing policy. Additionally, Muritala et al. (2019) empirically established that pricing significantly affects enrolment in private universities in Kwara State, Nigeria.

Skarmeas et al. (2016) conducted similar study on the influence of pricing capability on firm performance in export industries. Finding revealed that pricing capability significantly influences performance of export companies. The implication of this finding is that export firms can achieve superior performance with a strong pricing capability. Also, Liozu & Hinteruber, (2013) carried out a global study to examine the effect of pricing capability on organizational performance, covering and manufacturing firms, retail companies and service sectors. The study collected data through questionnaire administration. Data was analyzed using structural equation modeling. It was empirically found that pricing capability influences firm performance. Similarly, Uripia et al. (2021) examined the effect of pricing capability on organizational performance in food and restaurant sector. It was found empirically that pricing capability has positive effect on organizational performance. Another global study of 748 managers also found that pricing capabilities positively influence firm performance and are reinforced by center-led price management, change capacity, and championing behaviors (Liozu et al., 2014). Additionally, evidence from Indian SMEs also shows that pricing capability improves both pricing value and business performance, with pricing value partly mediating that relationship (Ranjan & Nayak, 2023).

While empirical evidences confirmed the existence of positive relationships and effects of pricing capability on organizational performance in various settings. Most studies focused on commercial sectors and private tertiary institutions, a thorough search for literature revealed the work of Muhammad et al. (2025) as one of the few prior studies linking pricing capability with organisational effectiveness in the context of private secondary schools in North-western Nigeria, hence a need for more literature. Also, the work of Muhammad et al. (2025) was limited to quantitative approach, with focus on three dimensions of pricing capability (price adaptive, price information and price negotiation capability) adopted from the

literature in commercial and corporate sectors, which might not explored the detailed picture of the situation, hence, a need for a qualitative approach to explore the context-based pricing capability.

3 Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study employed a phenomenological research design to explore the pricing capability of private schools and how it influences student enrolment and retention. The design was considered appropriate because it enabled the researchers to describe and interpret stakeholders' lived experiences relating to the phenomenon under investigation.

3.2 Population Sample and Sampling Technique

The target population consisted of 160 private secondary schools in Kebbi State. According to Creswell (2014), the ideal sample size in phenomenological research ranges from 6 to 10 participants, depending on the design and depth of inquiry. Based on this guidance, the researchers selected a total of 12 participants (six proprietors and six principals) to allow for in-depth exploration of participants' experiences. The participants were selected based on their relevant experience and knowledge of pricing practices in private secondary schools, having operated/managed private schools for more than 20 years.

3.3 Instrumentation

Data were collected using a structured interview guide comprising two sections. Section A contained questions on the background profiles of the participants, while Section B contained questions relating to their opinions on pricing capability and its influence on student enrolment and retention. The content and face validity of the interview guide were established through expert review. Experts in Economics of Education and Measurement and Evaluation examined the instrument to determine the adequacy, relevance, clarity and appropriateness of the items. A pilot study was also conducted outside the study area to refine the interview guide before the actual data collection. To ensure the trustworthiness of the data, the study followed the recommendations of Silverman (2011) and Creswell (2014). The interview guide was shared with participants before the interviews. With participants' consent, the interviews were recorded and accurately transcribed. The transcripts were subsequently returned to the participants for verification and confirmation of the accuracy of the information provided, thereby enhancing the credibility of the findings.

3.4 Data Collection Procedure

The data were collected through face-to-face structured interviews with the selected participants. The interviews were conducted in settings familiar to the respondents to facilitate comfortable and natural interaction. With participants' consent, the interviews were audio-recorded. In addition, the researchers observed participants' body language during the interviews to provide supplementary contextual information.

3.5 Method of Data Analysis

The background profiles of the participants were analyzed using frequency counts. The qualitative data obtained from the interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis. The analysis involved identifying, organizing and interpreting recurring themes and patterns emerging from participants' responses concerning pricing capability, student enrolment and retention. The data obtained from the interviews were analyzed using thematic analyses, a method that focuses on identifying recurring patterns and commonalities, referred to as themes, within qualitative datasets such as interview transcripts (Braun & Clarke, 2019). This analytical approach enabled the researchers to explore differing perspectives and highlight variations in the respondents' views. Inductive approach to thematic analysis was employed, in which themes emerge directly from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2019). The process begins with coding the data and then identifying relationships among the codes to develop meaningful themes, following the five step framework outlined by Braun and Clarke (2019), which includes: transcribing the data, identifying themes, reviewing and refining the themes, naming the themes and producing the final report.

4 Results

4.1 Background Information of Respondents

Table **1**

Respondents' Background information

S/N	Respondents	Category	Gender	Qualification
1	Informant 1	Proprietor	Male	Ph.D.
2	Informant 2	Proprietor	Male	Ph.D.
3	Informant 3	Proprietor	male	M. Ed.
4	Informant 4	Proprietor	Male	B. Sc.
5	Informant 5	Proprietor	Male	M. Ed.
6	Informant 6	Proprietor	Male	Ph. D.
7	Informant 7	Principal	Male	M. Ed.
8	Informant 8	Principal	Male	B. Sc.
9	Informant 9	Principal	Female	B. Sc.
10	Informant 10	Principal	Male	M. Ed.
11	Informant 11	Principal	Female	B. Sc.
12	Informant 12	Principal	Male	M. Ed.

Source: Field Data (2025)

Table 1 presents the background profile of informants. As presented in the table, 12 interviewees formed the total sample for the interviews. Six were proprietors while the other six principals of private schools. Based on gender, two of the interviewees were females whereas, the remaining 10 were males. Of the 12 informants, three (3) had Ph.D.; five (5) were holders of master degree; and four (4) were first degree holders.

4.2 Objective One – Pricing Capability of Private Secondary Schools

Managing school fees effectively in private school sector requires a blend of strategic capabilities that allow schools to respond to the needs of the community, economic realities, institutional goals, and price sensitivity of parents. In order to identify the pricing capability of private schools, proprietors were asked during the interview to state how they are able to manage school fees amidst economic challenges. Their responses were grouped into five themes as presented below:

4.2.1 Theme One: Price Bundling Capability

It was gathered that private schools use bundling capability to create a simplified and value driven school fee packages. This was emphasized by respondents in the following ways:

Informant 1, says "we sometimes have to bundle the most appealing services/products, like, instead of charging for tuition, books, uniforms, and other services separately, we combine these into a single, yet discounted fee package.

Also, informant 3 stated that "we use bundling strategy in our school to simplify school fees payments for parents and make our school services more affordable by creating a fee package in which multiple services and related products are bundled together in a single charge".

Likewise, informant 4 asserted that "We offer sibling discount for parents with multiple enrolled children and at the same time combine charges for different services/products in a single, more affordable package".

These responses show that private schools have bundling capability with bundling capability can make affordable yet, profitable school fees decision.

4.2.2 Theme Two: Price Adaptive Capability

From the responses gathered during the interview, it was revealed that due to the changes in the market conditions such as economic fluctuations, seasonal income variation among parents who are farmers and the competition, private schools adjust school fees accordingly. For example, informant 5 stated that "we sometimes experience difficult times during which

we adapt our budgeting internally by cutting unnecessary costs or delaying projects that are non-essential. We also offer flexible methods of payment, options for payment in installment, or even temporary discounts. This helps us attract students and maintain long term relationship with parents of existing students including those with limited sources of income."

Similarly, informant 6 stated that "during tough economic periods or farming off-seasons, we introduce deferments, installment plans, or even allow partial payments to ease the burden on parents. This adaptability is to help us in retaining students who might otherwise drop out of school due to financial constraints".

Informant 4 stated that "As educational needs of the society change in line with global transformation, we also adjust our mode of operation to meet the changing needs, alongside the financial implications.

These responses show that adaptive capability is necessary in both operation and school fees setting for a private school to survive.

4.2.3 Theme Three: Price Information Capability

The results of the interview analyses showed that private schools gather information from various sources before making any decisions about school fees.

For instance, informant 3 stated that "We always gather and analyze relevant information from parent feedback, community trends, school fees of the competitors, and internal cost data in order to make informed decision on our school fees".

Also, informant 1 stressed that "before we revise or set our fees, we carry out short surveys and informal consultations to understand what parents are willing and able to pay. This insight guides us in setting school fees at a realistic and acceptable level".

Likewise, informant 6 said that "we assess internal cost structures like staff salaries, learning resources and facility maintenance, collect feedback from parents through informal discussions and PTA meetings, analyze the fee structures of competing nearby schools. With this information, we make a data-driven decision that ensures our school fees are reasonable, affordable, competitive, and sufficient to sustain our operations. It also helps us justify any adjustments to stakeholders with clarity"

This implies that with information capability, private schools can informed school fees decisions, ensuring affordability for parents and profitability for schools.

4.2.4 Theme Four: Price Negotiation Capability

Negotiation is one the capabilities private schools used to maintain relationship with parents, as revealed by the informants. For example, informant 1 said that "Our will to respectfully negotiate with parents and relevant stakeholders builds trust and boosts parents' loyalty for us. In the long run, this will help in supporting the sustainability of our school for a long term".

Similarly, Informant 2 states that "our school maintains open channels of communication with parents to handle special cases. For instance, we discuss personalized payment terms with parents facing financial hardship, like payment in installment or waivers for parents with multiple enrolled children"

Other informants expressed that they understand the financial challenges that many parents face genuinely, especially those that have many enrolled children. As a result, they maintain an openness to school fee discussions by allowing parents to request for partial waivers, apply for family-based discounts, or even negotiate schedules of payment convenient for them. This approach helps them in building trust and goodwill. This makes many parents to respond by being more committed to timely payments in the future (informants 3 and 4).

4.2.5 Theme Five: Price Formation Capability

Respondents of the interview expressed the capability of private schools in formulating school fees. This was presented in the following ways:

Informants stated that they review their fees every year through consultation with school management, financial officers, teachers, and sometimes the PTA. They also take into consideration, estimated costs for the academic year, school improvement plans, and any new government regulations. They use this to formulate a balanced school fee that reflects

both the economic realities of the community and their educational goals. This structured and inclusive process enables them to maintain financial stability while also staying fair and responsive to the needs of parents (informants 2, 3 and 5).

Another informant stated that "we consults school management team, teachers, PTA representatives annually to develop a structured, inclusive process for setting and reviewing school fees. Through this approach, we make a wise, justifiable and transparent decision on school fees, which aligns with our operational goals"(informant 6).

From these responses, it can be inferred that setting and managing school fees in private secondary schools is a strategic mix of flexibility, insight and structure, driven by such capabilities as bundling, adaptability, informed decision, negotiation and structured fee formation. This implies that private school that applies these capabilities will be able to balance affordability for parents and its financial sustainability, ensuring that education remains accessible and the school remains effective.

4.3 Objective Two – Perceived Influence of Pricing Capability on Student Enrolment and Retention in Private Secondary Schools in Kebbi State, Nigeria

This section presents how pricing capability influences effectiveness of private schools as highlighted by the interviewees during the interview. The results of the interview analyses revealed that pricing capabilities of private schools play crucial roles in managing their operations and ensuring effectiveness for a long term. This was emphasized by the informants as presented in the following sub-themes:

4.3.1 Theme One: Price Bundling Capability versus Enrollment and Retention

Respondents highlighted that price bundling capability of a private school enables it to achieve significant rates of enrollment and retention in the following ways:

Informant 7 stated that "bundling multiple services like tuition, books, uniforms, transportation in a single, transparent fee offers more value to our school and simplifies payments for parents. This helps us retain existing students and attract potential ones"

Informant 9 said That "we experienced significant improvements in enrollment and retention since adopting the idea of bundling many of our services in a single fee especially among parents who are sensitive to price"

Informant 12 stressed that "Our ability to offer multiple services in a single, affordable fee improves our reputation for clarity and fairness. This has strengthened our standing in the community we serve"

These responses imply that price bundling capability helps in improving effectiveness of private schools through increased enrolment and enhanced students retention.

4.3.2 Sub-theme Two: Price Adaptive Capability versus Enrollment and Retention

It was also discovered that adaptive capability of private schools in setting/adjusting school fees enables them to maintain their relevance. This was emphasized by the informants;

Informants 9 and 10 stated that operating in an environment like this (referring to the areas in which they operate) where income levels of parents change constantly, coupled with inflation and economic instability, your ability as a private school to adapt to the situation in reviewing your school fees helps you remain relevant and attractive".

Informant 11 and 12 jointly stressed that ability to adjust school fee structure in line with the situation at hand by offering discounts temporarily, implementing flexible payment systems or sliding scale fees helps a school to maintain its competitiveness. With this, we are able to boosts trust among parents and ensure that we continue to be relevant and strong thereby attracting and retaining students (Informant 11).

4.3.3 Sub-theme Three: Price Information Capability versus Enrollment and Retention

It was gathered from the interview that effectiveness of the decision on school fees rests on the accuracy of the data, driven by information capability.

Some informants emphasized that analysis of the competitors, market surveying, feedback from parents and students, and internal financial reports enable private schools to make informed fee decision. Through this approach, private schools are

able optimize their school fees, align with the expectation of target community, leading to attracting and retaining students. This enables the schools to maintain stability financially without compromising quality of their services (informants 7, 8 and 10).

Also, informant 11 stated that "We listen to comments from parents and inputs from our staff, and we also keep an eye on what other schools are charging and how the cost of living is changing in the wider community. By combining all this information, we try to make smarter, more thoughtful decisions about our fees. This helps us set school fees that is fair and aligned with the market expectation, from which we build trust and improve long term relationship with parents".

4.3.4 Sub-theme Four: Price Negotiation Capability versus Enrollment and Retention

Price negotiation capability was found to enhance private school effectiveness, as stressed by the informants. For example, informant 8 stated that "in the present economic situation, we ought to be always open to having honest conversations with parents, especially when they are facing financial difficulties. By working together with them and finding solutions, we have been able to understand support parents, and this helps us, keep students in school who might otherwise have left. This kind of understanding not only strengthens the bond between our school and the community but also shows that we truly care. In the long run, it helps us in building reputation and makes our school worthy of enrollment".

Informant 11 said that "it is common for parents with multiple children enrolled in a particular school to ask for some flexibility with fees. Our ability of negotiating reasonably has improved our relationship with parents and contributed to high retention rates. This helps us create loyalty and strengthens a positive image of our school in the community"

4.3.5 Sub-theme Five: Price Formation Capability versus Enrollment and Retention

Price formation capability of private school was found to influence their effectiveness. This was stressed by the informants during the interview. For example,

Some informant emphasized that their ability to set their fees structure right from the start by considering things like the programmes they offer, future costs, and their plans for growth, helps them stay aligned with their long-term goals. This gives them the flexibility to invest in important areas like expanding facilities, supporting their staff, and improving the learning environment, all while keeping things affordable for parents (informants 7 and 12). This kind of ability is what keeps our school financially healthy and future-ready (informant 12.)

Informant 9 stated that "Our ability to develop a structured and inclusive process for setting fees, involving such stakeholders as management, staff, financial advisors and representatives from PTA ensures that our school fees decision aligns with our mission, reflects our costs of operation and are clearly communicated to all stakeholders. This allows us to attain attractiveness and maintain financial stability".

Therefore, these responses showed that pricing capability enables private schools achieve academic continuity, parent satisfaction, financial viability and effectiveness. This implies that in Northwestern Nigeria, where economic challenges are real, pricing capability is essential for the effectiveness of private school.

5 Discussion

The findings showed that price bundling, price adaptive, price information, price negotiation, and price formation capabilities collectively constitute pricing capability in private secondary schools in Kebbi State, Nigeria. These capabilities enable private schools to respond to market pressures by setting and managing school fees according to prevailing circumstances. This suggests that pricing capability enables private schools to maintain competitive fees while responding to changing economic and market conditions. The finding agrees with Muhammad et al. (2025), who found a high level of pricing capability in private secondary schools. It also aligns with Olaoye et al. (2018) and Murtala et al. (2019), who reported that pricing capability enables private universities to effectively set and manage tuition and related fees.

However, the positive contribution of pricing capability does not imply that all pricing practices are without potential drawbacks. Price bundling, for instance, may make school fees more attractive by combining tuition with other services, but excessive bundling may reduce transparency if parents are unable to clearly distinguish the costs and benefits of individual services. Similarly, price adaptive capability allows schools to adjust fees in response to economic conditions and changes in parents' purchasing power; nevertheless, frequent or substantial fee adjustments may create uncertainty for parents and negatively affect their confidence in the school. Price information capability can promote informed decision-

making and strengthen parents' trust when information is accurate and transparent. However, inadequate, delayed, or selectively presented pricing information may create misunderstanding and perceptions of unfairness. Price negotiation capability may help schools accommodate parents who experience temporary financial difficulties, but excessive negotiation may result in inconsistent treatment of parents, particularly where different families are charged different amounts for similar services. Such practices could create perceptions of inequity and undermine trust. Price formation capability enables schools to determine fees based on relevant costs, perceived value, and market conditions; however, fees formed primarily around cost recovery or competitive pressure may become unaffordable to some parents, particularly during periods of economic hardship.

Therefore, the implication of the finding is that pricing capability can help private schools maintain a strategic balance between affordability for parents and financial sustainability. However, its effectiveness depends on how responsibly and transparently the different pricing practices are implemented. Private schools need to combine flexibility with fairness, accurate information, transparency, and consistency to ensure that pricing decisions do not undermine parent satisfaction or student retention. Thus, pricing capability should not be understood simply as the ability to charge competitive fees, but also as the ability to manage pricing practices in a manner that considers both institutional sustainability and parents' capacity to pay. The study also showed that pricing capability influences enrolment and retention. The interview findings provided further insight into how pricing capability contributes to private school effectiveness through enhanced enrolment and retention. This indicates that pricing capability is an important determinant of student enrolment and retention in private schools. However, the relationship should not be interpreted as automatically positive in every circumstance. While affordable and flexible pricing may attract new students and encourage existing students to remain in school, poorly structured discounts, frequent fee changes, unclear charges, or unequal negotiation practices may discourage parents and contribute to dissatisfaction. The implication is that private schools with well-developed pricing capabilities are more likely to attract and retain students when their pricing practices are perceived as affordable, transparent, fair, and predictable. Therefore, pricing capability can serve as a strategic driver of enrolment and retention when the different pricing practices are implemented responsibly.

This finding is consistent with Muhammad et al. (2025), who found a significant influence of pricing capability on the effectiveness of private secondary schools. It also aligns with Liozu (2013), who demonstrated the positive impact of pricing capability on firm performance across manufacturing, retail, and service sectors. Similarly, Skarmeas et al. (2016) found that pricing capability significantly influenced the performance of export firms in Europe. Despite differences in context, geographical location, and research approaches, the consistency of these findings suggests that pricing capability can contribute meaningfully to organisational effectiveness. Nevertheless, the present finding should be interpreted with caution because the effectiveness of pricing capability depends on the manner in which individual pricing practices are implemented. Thus, the findings converge on the view that pricing capability can enable private schools in Kebbi State, Nigeria, to improve enrolment and retention. However, achieving this outcome requires pricing practices that balance institutional financial viability with affordability, transparency, fairness, and the long-term interests of parents and students.

6 Conclusion

The study explored pricing capability as a strategic resource for enhancing student enrolment and retention in private secondary schools in Kebbi State, Nigeria. The findings revealed that pricing capability comprises five major dimensions: price bundling, price adaptive, price information, price negotiation, and price formation capabilities. These capabilities enable private schools to develop and manage school fees in response to institutional operational costs, prevailing economic conditions, competitive pressures, and parents' financial circumstances. The findings further revealed that pricing capability contributes to student enrolment and retention through affordable fee packages, flexible payment arrangements, informed pricing decisions, stakeholder engagement, and systematic fee determination. The study therefore concluded that pricing capability constitutes an important strategic resource for private secondary schools to attract prospective students, retain existing students, and sustain institutional operations. Private secondary school proprietors and administrators should strengthen pricing capability by adopting transparent and affordable fee bundling, flexible payment arrangements, informed pricing decisions, fair negotiation with parents, and systematic stakeholder participation in fee determination. These practices should balance parents' ability to pay with institutional financial sustainability, thereby enhancing student enrolment and retention.

7 Contribution to Knowledge

The study extends the literature on pricing capability to the private secondary school sector in North-West Nigeria, particularly Kebbi State, where empirical evidence is scarce. The present study extends the existing pricing capability construct from four previously recognised dimensions to five by introducing price formation capability and demonstrates that these capabilities are relevant to student enrolment and retention in the context of private secondary schools in Kebbi State. This expands the understanding of pricing capability beyond dimensions commonly derived from commercial and corporate sectors.

8 Limitations of the Study

The study involved only 12 participants (six proprietors and six principals), which may limit the transferability of the findings to all private secondary schools in Nigeria. The study was restricted to private secondary schools in Kebbi State and may not fully reflect the realities of private schools in other regions of Nigeria. Data were collected only from proprietors and principals. Other important stakeholders such as parents, teachers, and students were not included, which may have limited the breadth of perspectives obtained. The exclusive use of a qualitative approach means that the findings cannot establish the magnitude of the influence of pricing capability on enrolment and retention. Quantitative or mixed-method studies could provide additional evidence. The study captured participants' views at a single point in time and did not examine how pricing capability and its effects on enrolment and retention may change over time.

9 Declarations

Ethical Statement: The study complied with the established ethical standards for research involving human participants. The ethical approval was obtained from the University Ethical Review Committee (UERC), University of Ilorin, because the major author of the paper was a PhD student of the University of Ilorin at the time the study was conducted. The study formed part of the author's PhD thesis, which covered private secondary schools across Northwestern Nigeria, including Kebbi State. The University of Ilorin, as the author's degree-awarding institution, reviewed and approved the research protocol and issued the ethical approval certificate (UERC/ASN/2024/2943), valid from 10/10/2024 to 9/10/2027. The present study was extracted from this approved PhD thesis and therefore falls within the scope of the research for which ethical approval was granted. In addition, a letter of introduction was obtained from the Department of Educational Management, University of Ilorin, which provided official authorization to contact the selected private secondary schools and seek permission for data collection. Participants' informed consent was obtained, and participation was entirely voluntary. They were adequately informed about the purpose of the study and their right to withdraw at any stage without penalty. All information provided by the participants was treated with strict confidentiality, used solely for the purposes of the study, and participants' identities were kept anonymous.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare that there are no potential conflicts of interest related to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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