

Service Marketing Mix and Students' Enrolment in Private Secondary Schools in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between service marketing mix and students' enrolment in private secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. To achieve this purpose, five specific objectives, five research questions and five null hypotheses were formulated in this study. The correlational research design was used and the population was all 495 principals in the 495 private secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State but a sample size of 221 principals selected through multi-stage sampling procedure was employed as the sample size. A self-developed questionnaire titled "Service Marketing Mix and Students' Enrolment Questionnaire" with reliability of 0.78 was used for data collection. Out of the 221 participants sampled, 213 principals participated in the study. The hypotheses were tested using linear regressions at 0.05 alpha level. The findings showed that product (people, process and physical evidence), price (fees charged), place (location) and promotion respectively had significant effect on students' enrolment in private secondary schools. Based on these findings, it was concluded that service marketing mix have significant effect on students' enrolment in private secondary schools. It was recommended among others that proprietors of private secondary schools should utilize service marketing mix such as product (people, process and physical evidence), price, place and promotion as this would make more students to enroll in their schools.

Keywords: Service marketing mix, students' enrolment, private schools

Article information

Received 13 September 2024;

Accepted 26 October 2024;

Published 11 November 2024

<https://doi.org/10.26765/DRJMSS0274537530>

Citation: Akpan, E. F., Ibok, N. I., and Etuk, A. J. (2024). Service Marketing Mix and Students' Enrolment in Private Secondary Schools in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. *Direct Research Journal of Management and Strategic Studies*. Vol. 5(3), Pp. 9-15.

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INTRODUCTION

The government expanded education to allow for private organization involvement. In order to meet the rising need for high-quality programs and overall innovations in contemporary educational procedures, more schools have been established. Schools are now vying for pupils and coming up with innovative strategies to meet the requirements and wishes of both the parents and children as a result of the private sector's involvement, which creates a profit motivation. Since the start, schools have

expanded mostly in reaction to innovation, the desire to satisfy worldwide standards, and Nigeria's educational needs (Onyemaechi, 2021). Since private secondary schools were founded to educate pupils from middle-class to upper-class families, their offerings always appear to be marketed for financial gain, much like those of other economic enterprises. The distinction lies in their role in delivering education to people as a public service, that helps to close the gap between the amounts of

colleges the government can build to accommodate the whole population. In the meantime, it needs a significant amount of student enrollment to maintain its viability as a well-known private or business organization. The degree of public patronage they receive is mostly determined by how successfully they execute their school's promotion initiatives, which include adopting tactics to successfully raise recognition and position their institutions as the best, providing compelling arguments for guardians and parents to select them for their children.

Furthermore, private school administrators seem to maintain more effective discipline with their instructors and guarantee a certain degree of service to customers thanks to the clear, expedient responsibility of the educational institution to the fee-paying parent, who has the right to discontinue the student at any moment without notification (Tooley and Dixon, 2020; Härmä, 2021). Given that educators in private schools receive incredibly low pay and that the threat of losing their jobs serves as much of a reward than pay, this duty path is prone to increase instruction, even in the lack of substantial teacher energy (Adelabu & Rose, 2020; Härmä, 2020). It seems that low-cost private school teachers may be teaching their students more than those at government schools, despite the fact that many of them lack the necessary qualifications (Tooley & Dixon, 2020).

Consequently, the extent to which effective services are delivered to customers is an important aspect of service marketing plan in order to avoid failure. There is need to emphasize on setting up a process in place that is quick, reliable and easy because the success of any service business in delivery quality service depends largely on the process (Attih, Ikpe, and Mfon, 2017). In essence, physical evidence is the environment in which the service is delivered and any tangible component that facilitates the performance and communication of the service. For example, in an educational institution like secondary school that has an aesthetical environmental layout, good class room blocks with well- equipped facilities, good looking and well-dressed staff and students. All these are parts of physical evidence of an educational institution and are important components of the business. Considering these factors, it was necessary to investigate the relationship between service marketing mix and students' enrolment in private secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

Statement of the problem

Due to the increase in the number of private schools in Akwa Ibom State, private school owners are faced with strong competition and thus, the survival of some of these private schools seems to be shaky and at risk. For instance, the Akwa Ibom State Government through the Ministry of Education in 2019 closed down 1,140 private

nurseries, primary and secondary schools for lack of necessary educational facilities and infrastructure (Premium Time Newspaper August 22, 2019). Most private schools even find it difficult to increase their students' enrolment, and this is a result of the high number of choices available to students. The programmes they offer, the members of staff, and school tuition are all dependent on the number of students that enroll in a school.

As observed by the researcher, some private secondary schools, which had existed, are no longer operational and have folded. The folding up of these private secondary schools and others could be caused by poor educational services such as poor teaching techniques, poor monitoring/supervision of teaching/learning, poor implementation of curriculums, lack of provision of learning materials/facilities and poor staffing.

This poor educational services could affect the school image, students' enrolment, students' performance, parents' satisfaction, and return on investment, and finally, folding up of private secondary schools.

In order to solve this problem of school closure and fold up, one may ask, what could be responsible for the poor educational services that made the private secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State to be closed down or fold up? Could it be that the proprietors do not utilize service marketing mix? To answer these questions, this study investigated if service marketing mix relates to students' enrolment in private secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study was to investigate the relationship between service marketing mix and students' enrolment in private secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The specific objectives were to examine:

- i. The effect of product (people, process and physical evidence) on students' enrolment in private secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State.
- ii. The effect of price (fees charged) on students' enrolment in private secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State.
- iii. The effect of place (school location) on students' enrolment in private secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State.
- iv. The effect of promotion (internal and external communication) on students' enrolment in private secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State.
- v. The joint effect of product (people, process and physical evidence), price, place and promotion on students' enrolment in private secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State.

Research Hypotheses

- i. There is no significant effect of product (people, process and physical evidence) on students' enrolment in private secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State.
- ii. There is no significant effect of price (fees charged) on students' enrolment in private secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State.
- iii. There is no significant effect of place (school location) on students' enrolment in private secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State.
- iv. There is no significant effect of promotion (internal and external communication) on students' enrolment in private secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State.
- v. There is no significant joint effect of product (people, process and physical evidence), price, place and promotion on students' enrolment in private secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State

Literature review

Service marketing in the educational sector

The degree of public support that in private controlled secondary colleges receive primarily depends on how successfully they market their establishments, which includes adopting tactics to raise popularity and portray their schools as the very best, as well as providing justifications for parents to select them for their children. According to Umar (2018), the ability of numerous institutions to draw in and keep students, mobilize assets, monitor student progress, and successfully make their programmes appealing to the outside world are all critical to their existence. Increasing student enrolment requires well-coordinated plans and new programs provided by the school. It also requires the cooperation of teachers and administration to devise the most suitable strategy for the school. Every school is different, as no two schools are the same. Being able to express that uniqueness is what is important. What makes a private secondary school unique could be sport, approach to teaching, being a faith-based school, or rendering special programmes. That unique feature is the brand and that is what parents recognize before they enroll their children. The procedure of learners getting enrolled in schools is referred to as "student enrolment." It speaks of the quantity of pupils enrolled in a particular school. The entire number of learners who are enrolled in an institution and/or properly documented is known as enrollment. The gross enrolment ratio, which displays the overall quantity of students registered at a specific level of the school system, regardless of age, divided by the population of age group that formally matches to that threshold, is the first of two primary indications of enrolment levels, which are rates of schooling, according

to Nkedishu and Onyekwe (2024). The net enrollment ratio is another metric. The ratio of overall enrollment, irrespective of age, to the population of the age category that formally belongs to that specific grade of schooling is known as the gross enrollment ratio.

According to Essien et al. (2023), the presence of educational resources affects school enrollment and is undoubtedly beneficial. This phrase can also refer to the total quantity of pupils enrolled at a school at the moment. It is the process of enrolling in classes, extracurricular tasks, or both at the peculiar institution (Inyang & Etuk, 2019). Once a learner is accepted into specific educational institutions, the enrollment procedure is over. The process of "enrolling" a learner involves completing and completing registration, obtaining test results and transcripts, composing reference letters (if necessary), conducting an assessment, and assigning a seat in the chosen class. Implementation of the service marketing mix may lead to increased student enrollment.

The procedure of pitching services or immaterial product to a certain demographic is known as service marketing. It involves promoting and trading intellectual goods, or invisible goods. The operations and procedures that market and provide customers with immaterial products are collectively referred to as service marketing.

In contrast to product selling, which promotes physical goods, service marketing highlights invisible elements like experiences, knowledge, and relationships with consumers; it combines a number of tactics and methods to improve consumer happiness and deliver remarkable encounters (Jabbar et al., 2019). The service marketing mix is a marketing technique that comprises of a set of strategic components service-based businesses utilize to create and deliver value to their customers.

This marketing mix emphasizes the unique characteristics of intangible services. It is a comprehensive framework that caters to the needs of service-oriented businesses. Uford and Duh (2021) opines that successfully selling immaterial products and services, guaranteeing client happiness, and fostering enduring connections all depend on this framework. It highlights how important people and procedures are to providing a great and unforgettable customer experience, in addition to conventional marketing components. Service marketing mix elements comprise of; product, price, place, promotion, people, process and physical evidence. A product is anything that can be offered to a market to satisfy a need or want, and consists of attributes that can satisfy consumers. Kotler, et al. (2011) stated that a product as anything that can be offered to the market for attention, acquisition, use or consumption that might satisfy a want or need. A product can be tangible in nature, that is, physical product that can be seen, touched, tasted or felt such as clothes, televisions, cars, chairs, handsets or cell phones.

In service marketing, service firms, like educational

institutions, teach their employees in customer service and interpersonal skills with an emphasis on client pleasure. As a result, employees have a significant impact on how customers view the quality of the services they receive (Etuk et al., 2023). Establishing guidelines to raise the caliber of services rendered by staff members and keeping an eye on their performance is a crucial marketing duty. Process has to do with selecting from many methods to provide the service. It is the actual processes, system, and sequence of events that provide services. In order to secure continuous business, service firms compete constantly to provide their clients with the fastest, most successful, productive, and highest-quality service possible (Attih et al., 2017).

METHODOLOGY

Correlational research design was used in this study. This is a type of non-experimental research design that seeks to find relationship between independent and dependent variables without the researcher controlling or manipulating any of them. The population of this study consisted of 495 principals in the 495 private secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State.

The choice of the population was based on the fact that they are in the best position to give their response on service marketing mix and performance of private secondary schools. Sample sizes of 221 principals were used for this study, and it was selected using multi-stage sampling procedure. A structured questionnaire developed by the researcher with a reliability coefficient of 0.77 was used for data collection from the primary sources. The questionnaire was titled "Service Marketing Mix and Students' Enrolment Questionnaire". Thus, first-hand data were gathered in real time, directly from principals of private secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State.

The questionnaire had 35 items, which elicited information on the seven service marketing mix used in this study (product, people, process, physical evidence, place, price and promotion, as well as student enrolment. The items were declarative statements structured on a 4-point response scale of strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree. Out of the 221 principals sampled, 213 agreed to participate in the study. These 213 principals responded to the questionnaire and returned to the researcher, making 96 percent return rates. Simple and multiple regressions were used to answer the research questions and test the hypotheses at 0.05 alpha level.

The coefficient of correlation provided by Udoh (2019) was used to describe the relationship between the independent and dependent variables, which are 0.00 to 0.20 (very low relationship), 0.21 to 0.40 (low relationship), 0.41 to 0.60 (moderate relationship), .61

to 0.80 (high relationship) and 0.81 to 0.99 (very high relationship). The analysis was done using Statistical Package for Social Science.

RESULTS

Hypothesis One

There is no significant effect of product (people, process and physical evidence) on students' enrolment in private secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State.

The result in (Table 1) shows if there is no significant effect of product (people, process and physical evidence) on students' enrolment in private secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State. The coefficient of correlation (R) of 0.623 indicates a high relationship between product and students' enrolment. The beta weight of 0.510 shows that for every unit increase in product, students' enrolment increases by 0.510. Also, the coefficient of determination (R^2) of 0.389 indicates that product predicts up to 38.9 percent in students' enrolment. The small error value of 0.463 shows that product predicts students' enrolment with high accuracy. The result indicates that the p-value of 0.000 is lower than the alpha value of .05 at F-value of 134.149 with 1 and 212 degrees of freedom. The regression model is shown as students' enrolment = $1.029 + 0.510\text{product} + 0.463$. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected, which implies that there is significant effect of product (people, process and physical evidence) on students' enrolment in private secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State.

Table 1: Summary of simple regression analysis of effect of product on students' enrolment in private secondary schools.

Variables	R	β	R^2	Error		
Product (X)						
Students' enrolment (Y)	0.623	0.510	0.389	0.463		
Sources of variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Remark
Regression	28.809	1	28.809	134.149	0.000	
Residual	45.313	211	0.215			Significant
Total	74.122	212				

*Significant at $P < 0.05$, $n = 213$

Hypothesis two

There is no significant effect of price (fees charged) on students' enrolment in private secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State.

The result in (Table 2) shows if there is no significant effect of price (fee charged) on students' enrolment in private secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State. The coefficient of correlation (R) of .666 shows a high relationship between price and students' enrolment. The beta weight of 0.616 shows that for every unit increase in price, students' enrolment decreases by 0.616 (61.6%). In addition, the coefficient of determination (R^2) of 0.392

shows that price predicts up to 39.2 percent in students' enrolment. The small error value of .564 shows that price predicts student enrolment with high accuracy. The result indicates that the p-value of 0.000 is lower than the alpha value of 0.05 at F-value of 136.123 with 1 and 212 degrees of freedom. The regression model is shown as student enrolment = 0.944 + -0.616price + 0.564. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected, which means that there is significant effect of price (fee charged) on students' enrolment in private secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State.

Table 2: Summary of simple regression analysis of effect of price (fee charged) on students' enrolment in private secondary schools.

Variables	R	β	R ²	Error		
Price (fee charged) (X)	0.666	0.616	0.392	0.564		
Students' enrolment (Y)						
Sources of variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Remark
Regression	43.368	1	43.368	136.123	0.000	
Residual	67.223	211	0.319			Significant
Total	110.592	212				

*Significant at P < 0.05, n = 213

Hypothesis three

There is no significant effect of place (location) on students' enrolment in private secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State.

The result in (Table 3) shows if there is no significant effect of place (location) on students' enrolment in private secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State. The coefficient of correlation (R) of .652 shows a high relationship between place (school location) and students' enrolment. The beta weight of 0.656 indicates that for every unit improvement in place (school location), students' enrolment increases by 0.656. In addition, the coefficient of determination (R²) of 0.425 indicates that place (school location) predicts up to 42.5 percent in students' enrolment. The small error value of 0.548 shows that place (school location) predicts student enrolment with high accuracy. The result indicates that the p-value of 0.000 is lower than the alpha value of 0.05 at F-value of 156.061 with 1 and 212 degrees of freedom. The regression model is shown as student enrolment = 0.840 + 0.656place + 0.548. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected, which implies that there is significant effect of place (location) on students' enrolment in private secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State.

Table 3: Summary of simple regression analysis of effect of place (location) on students' enrolment in private secondary schools.

Variables	R	β	R ²	Error		
Place (school location) (X)	0.652	0.656	0.425	0.548		
Students' enrolment (Y)						
Sources of variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Remark
Regression	47.020	1	47.020	156.061	0.000	
Residual	63.572	211	0.301			Significant
Total	110.592	212				

*Significant at P < 0.05, n = 213

Hypothesis four

There is no significant effect of promotion on students' enrolment in private secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State. The result in (Table 4) shows if there is no significant effect of promotion on students' enrolment in private secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State. The coefficient of correlation (R) of 0.610 shows a high relationship between promotion and students' enrolment. The beta weight of .647 indicates that for every unit increase in promotion, students' enrolment increases by .372. Also, the coefficient of determination (R²) of 0.372 indicates that promotion predicts up to 37.2 percent in students' enrolment. The small error value of 0.573 shows that promotion predicts student enrolment with high accuracy. The result indicates that the p-value of 0.000 is lower than the alpha value of 0.05 at F-value of 125.079 with 1 and 212 degrees of freedom. The regression model is shown as student enrolment = 0.882 + 0.647promotion + 0.573. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected, which means that there is significant effect of promotion on students' enrolment in private secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State.

Table 4: Summary of simple regression analysis of effect of promotion on students' enrolment in private secondary schools.

Variables	R	β	R ²	Error		
Promotion (X)	0.610	0.647	0.372	0.573		
Students' enrolment (Y)						
Sources of variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Remark
Regression	41.159	1	41.159	125.079	0.000	
Residual	69.432	211	0.329			Significant
Total	110.592	212				

*Significant at P < 0.05, n = 213

Hypothesis five

There is no significant joint effect of product (people, process and physical evidence), price, place and promotion on students' enrolment in private secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State.

The result in (Table 5) shows if there is no significant joint effect of product, price, place and promotion on students' enrolment in private secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State. The correlation coefficient (R) of 0.653 indicates a high relationship between joint effect of product, price, place, promotion and students' enrolment. The coefficient of determination (R²) of 0.426 indicates that product, price, place and promotion jointly contribute 42.6 percent to students' enrolment. The beta weight of 0.563 indicates that for every unit increase in product, there is an increase of 0.563 in students' enrolment when price, place and promotion remain constant. The beta weight of -0.600 indicates that for every unit increase in price, there is a decrease of -0.600 in students' enrolment when product, place and promotion remain constant. The beta weight of 0.615 indicates that for every unit increase in place, there is an increase of 0.615 in students'

Table 5: Summary of multiple regression analysis of joint effect of product, price, place and promotion on students' enrolment in private secondary schools.

Variables	R	R ²	β	Error		
Product (X ₁)			0.563			
Price (X ₂)			-0.600	0.552		
Place (X ₃)	0.653	0.426		0.615		
Promotion (X ₄)				0.402		
Students' enrolment (Y)						
Sources of variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Remark
Regression	47.161	4	11.790	38.6630.000		
Residual	63.430	208	.305			Significant
Total	110.592	212				

*Significant at P < 0.05, n = 213

enrolment when product, price and promotion remain constant. The beta weight of 0.402 indicates that for every unit improvement in promotion, there is an increase of 0.402 in students' enrolment when product, price and place remain constant. The small error value of 0.552 shows that product (people, process and physical evidence), price, place and promotion jointly predict student enrolment with high accuracy. The result indicates that the p-value of .000 is lower than the alpha value of .05 at F-value of 38.663 with 1 and 212 degrees of freedom. The regression model is shown as student enrolment = 0.815 + 0.563product + -0.600price + 0.615place + 0.402 promotion + 552. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected, which implies that there is significant joint effect of product, price, place and promotion on students' enrolment in private secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State.

DISCUSSION

The result of hypothesis one showed that product (people, process and physical evidence) have significant effect on students' enrolment in private secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State. This finding collaborates that of Ayolugbe *et al.* (2019) whose findings demonstrated that using high-quality human and instructional resource materials with quality service delivery was necessary to improve student number in secondary schools. Educational service providers should be thoroughly aware that they must effectively utilize good personnel and other resources so as to attract students to their school. The result of hypothesis two indicated that price (fee charged) have great and significant effect on students' enrolment in private secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State. This finding has indicated that price is an important variable that affects other variables, which consequently influence the amount that private secondary school owners charge. Private secondary schools attach importance to price. This is the reason they are very careful with the amounts students are charged as fees because it could influence students' enrolment. Parents want to get good educational services for the fees charged. This finding collaborates that of Marinah (2022) who reported that there was a significant relationship between increases in tuition fee

and reduction in the level of student's enrolment. The result of hypothesis three showed that place (school location) had great and significant effect on students' enrolment in private secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State. This finding has shown that the place where a school is located is important in student enrolment. In most developing countries around worldwide, individuals residential areas possess rural and urban traits. Since most Akwa Ibom State settlements are rural settlements, rural households have taken advantage of the opportunity to enroll their children to local middle and high colleges in the hopes that the modern education will improve their chances for a brighter tomorrow. Identical findings were made by Ekaette *et al.* (2020), who discovered that enrollment ratios were greater in major and metropolitan colleges than in remote and rural educational institutions.

The result of hypothesis four indicated that promotion had great and significant effect on students' enrolment in private secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State. This finding has shown that promotion is an important marketing mix that affects enrolment. This is because it helps to disseminate information about a private school, encourage the patronage and decision-making of parents who want to enroll their children in private schools. According to this research, a mix of media and action draws prospective students to the selling points in order to satisfy their wants and requirements, which in turn boosts student enrollment. This result is consistent with that of Khan and Qureshi (2019), who discovered that four aspects of promotion that include public relationships, awareness, school advertising, as well as print and electronic media advertisements had an impact on enrollment of students.

The result of hypothesis five showed that product, price, place and promotion had great and significant joint effect on students' enrolment in private secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State. The product of a private secondary school like personnel, processes and physical evidence are necessary for student enrolment. Staff members effectively improve school duties and academic results by managing staff, finances, and organizational development. In the modern era, they have to take on the duties that come with becoming the heads of their schools and conducting education. Furthermore, school leadership and teachers must ensure that teaching methods and evaluation of students and teachers are constantly done so that students' achievement can be ensured.

Teachers also need to show up for class at the designated time and make sure that the learners pay attention to what is taught. This finding is in line with that of Jabbar *et al.* (2019) whose finding of this study was that teachers' agreed that effective utilization of personnel, facilities, good service delivery, awareness processes and a well-organized environment would improve student enrolment.

Conclusion

Service marketing mix such as price, place and promotion respectively have significant effect on students' enrolment in private secondary schools. Therefore, based on these findings, it was concluded that service marketing mix plays a significant role in students' enrolment in private secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

Recommendations

- i. Proprietors of private secondary schools should employ qualified and people to manage their schools, adopt process that are result-oriented and provide physical evidence that would make their schools outstanding as this would improve students' enrolment.
- ii. Proprietors of private secondary schools should make their fees to be moderate and make very bright students not to pay fees or pay less fees so that many parents who have not enrolled their wards in private secondary schools would consider enrolling them in private secondary schools.
- iii. Proprietors should strategically locate private schools where it can be accessed by parents and students, and provide school buses with low charges so that more students could be enrolled in their schools irrespective of location.
- iv. Proprietors of private secondary schools should not relent in promoting their schools in the mass and social media in order to create more awareness and attract more customers.
- v. Proprietors of private secondary schools should use a combination of all the service marketing mix as they can make them to compete favourably in a highly competitive environment and remain in service.

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