

Beyond perceived affordability: Examining the relationship between private school fees, household income, and pre-primary school learners' enrollment in urban Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the relationship between private preschool fees and household income on pre-primary school enrollment rates in Ibadan North Local Government Area, Oyo State. The study sampled 200 parents across five public primary schools with pre-primary sections ($n = 100$) and five registered private preschools ($n = 100$). Data were collected using two standardized instruments: the Questionnaire on Parents' Socio-Economic Factors (QPSEF) and the Parents' Questionnaire on the Influence of Household Income and Private School Fees on Pupils' Enrollment (PQIHIPCPE), with Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients of 0.81 and 0.86, respectively. Data were analyzed using both descriptive statistics (weighted means) and inferential statistics (Pearson Product Moment Correlation, Multiple Regression, and Independent Samples t-test). Descriptive results revealed that parents perceived the extent of influence of private school fees ($WA = 3.50$) and household income ($WA = 2.90$) on pre-primary enrollment to be high. However, inferential analysis demonstrated no statistically significant relative contribution of private school fees ($\beta = -0.025$, $t = -0.211$, $p > 0.05$) or household income ($\beta = -0.092$, $t = -0.761$, $p > 0.05$) to enrollment rates. Furthermore, there was no significant joint contribution of both independent variables ($F_{(2, 197)} = 0.319$, $p > 0.05$, $R^2 = 0.009$), no significant relationship between private school fees and enrollment ($r = -0.030$, $p > 0.05$), no significant relationship between household income and enrollment ($r = -0.090$, $p > 0.05$), and no significant difference in enrollment impacts based on fee structures ($t_{(198)} = 0.842$, $p > 0.05$). The study concluded that while parents perceive financial factors as significant considerations, empirical enrollment rates in the study area operate independently of private fee structures and household income limits. Recommendations include establishing state-level quality monitoring standards and expanding public-private support frameworks for early childhood centers.

Keywords: Education, private school fees, household income, enrollment rates, pre-primary school, early childhood education..

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INTRODUCTION

Education and training investments play a fundamental role in developing human capital; they enhance social values and skills that improve individual productivity and, by extension, community and national development. Preschool and pre-primary education form the foundation for all other learning because they lay the groundwork for subsequent learning, human development, and social

progress (Lewin, 2008). Pre-primary education is currently one of the fastest-growing areas in education and serves as a critical pillar of foundational basic education while also contributing to Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) in the global space.

In Nigeria, pre-primary education is mainly delivered through a mix of public and private childcare services

(Akintunde and Olaniyi, 2021). The government has consistently promoted private-public partnership to scale up early childhood care and education (ECCE) services nationwide and as a result, the private sector has come to constitute a significant portion of early childhood providers. In addition, parents typically prefer private pre-primary institutions because they perceive them to offer better play and learning environments, smaller pupil-teacher ratios, early literacy instruction, and more focused attention (Okeke and Adeleke, 2022).

At the center of the issue of access to early childhood care is pre-primary school enrollment which is defined as the percentage of children aged three to five years who are currently enrolled in early childhood educational institutions (Babatunde et al., 2022). Early childhood enrollment is considered an essential predictor of school readiness, language development, and overall learning success. A high percentage of pre-primary school enrollment indicates the level of education of a country and the proper use of its early childhood educational resources and on the other hand, a low percentage or its inconsistency demonstrates a lack of resources or accessibility to them, which is especially harmful to children's learning experiences at an early age (UNESCO, 2024). In support of the foregoing, recent empirical research demonstrates that attendance in public pre-K and Head Start programs significantly predicts stronger long-term cognitive outcomes, specifically outperforming non-attenders in third-grade numeracy and academic skills (Phillips et al, 2024). Additionally, pre-K attendance was shown to substantially reduce post-pandemic chronic absenteeism among dual-language learners.

One of the main reasons for the inconsistency in enrollment is the cost of preschool education which includes the opportunity cost of a child's parents and the direct costs of preschool attendance, such as fees, registration, books, development taxes, uniforms, and transportation (Daugherty, 2001; Levy and Sloan, 2013). Since pre-primary education in Nigeria is mostly provided by private institutions, the fees are not regulated and can be volatile (Lawal et al., 2024). A high level of preschool fees makes high-quality preschool education inaccessible to a large percentage of the population and contributes to the inaccessibility of early childhood care in general.

Equally decisive in the early years is the second independent variable, which is the family's income. This refers to the general economic status, purchasing power, and budget of the parents or guardians. In early childhood economics, the level of income determines the capacity of the parents to bear the direct costs of giving birth to a child without compromising on their welfare needs (Ezenwa and Adebayo, 2023). For instance, in times of rising incomes or stable wages, the parents are in a better position to provide direct private pre-primary education without feeling economically disadvantaged compared to periods of recession when wages are unstable. Consequently, the income level of the family often determines whether the

child will start schooling in a private pre-primary institution, switch to a public preschool, or stay at home until primary school begins (Ogunyemi and Alabi, 2023).

From an economics perspective, the relationship between the independent variable (family's income) and the dependent variable (enrollment in pre-primary education) is explicable by the Human Capital Theory and the Consumer Choice Theory of Economics. According to the Human Capital Theory, parents consider education as an investment with future returns, which enhances the child's cognitive abilities and socio-economic status (Ezenwa and Adebayo, 2023). On the other hand, the Consumer Choice Theory focuses on how much of a given good or service one can afford based on their budget and purchasing power. In this case, the consumer (family) will choose between private pre-primary education and public preschool education based on their income and how much they are willing to spend on their child's early childhood education. For instance, if the fee structure of a private pre-primary institution exceeds the family's budget, then they can opt for a cheaper public preschool or wait until they can afford to enroll their child in a private pre-primary institution.

Apart from the economic-related arguments presented above, this study is based on theoretical foundations related to early childhood development and learning. According to Vygotsky's Socio-Cultural Theory of Cognitive Development, learning is a social activity that occurs in a specific context. In particular, cognitive development is influenced by More Knowledgeable Others (MKOs), which can be teachers, the school setting, and resources available to children in their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). With that said, private institutions with high-quality educational resources, lower student-teacher ratios, and other advantages can provide better ZPD for children compared to public institutions. Nevertheless, such benefits are available only to children whose parents can afford private education. Therefore, students from disadvantaged backgrounds may face limitations concerning their cognitive development potential.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory regards development as a function of multiple environments. In particular, family socioeconomic status (SES) is considered, which falls under the umbrella of an exosystem, significantly influences a child's microsystem, which includes the school and family. On the other hand, the article also reflects Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory that views the environment as consisting of several systems that influence development. According to the theory, a child's development occurs as he/she interacts with the immediate environment (microsystem), the larger environment (macrosystem), and the outer layer (exosystem) (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In most cases, the financial status of a family determines whether a child will attend a private pre-primary institution or not. In other words, Bronfenbrenner's theory explains the situation

using the exosystem, which is characterized by the parents' employment status, income level, and the economic status of the neighborhood. On the other hand, the microsystem comprises the home and school environments, which are significantly influenced by the exosystem. For instance, if a parent loses their job, the exosystem will be altered, which affects their capacity to pay fees for a private pre-school. As a result, the child is unable to join a pre-primary institution they previously attended due to an inability to pay the school fees.

The practical implications of the discussed economic and developmental issues were particularly acute in Ibadan North Local Government Area of Oyo State. As a rapidly growing municipality with a critical concentration of academic institutions, Ibadan North has witnessed an explosive demand for pre-primary education. While private primary education was traditionally confined to elite enclaves, Ibadan's rapid urban growth and the concentration of major tertiary institutions (e.g., University of Ibadan, University College Hospital) in Ibadan North triggered the rise of dual-income working households in 1990s-2000s. This need has prompted the proliferation of private early childhood care centers in major residential areas, resulting in private pre-primary institutions dominating the provision of early childhood education in the region.

While Ibadan North's private preschools play a crucial role in meeting the local demand for early childhood education, they face significant challenges due to the unstable national macroeconomic environment. Recent inflation and soaring operational costs for school proprietors have resulted in increased fees at private pre-primary institutions throughout Oyo State (Gbadamosi and Adeleke, 2026). At the same time, the purchasing power of most local residents has decreased due to reduced household income (Chukwuma and Suleiman, 2025). Thus, the relationship between the rising costs of private preschool education and local residents' capacity to bear these costs is a matter of great concern.

Recent studies conducted among Southwestern Nigeria's residents suggest that the identified financial constraints have already triggered a noticeable shift in local residents' attitudes towards early childhood education. Parents who are unable to afford private pre-primary school fees often opt to enroll their children in public primary school's early childhood sections or defer enrollment until the child is five years old (Adesina and Danjuma, 2024). However, the issue of whether and how the dynamics of private preschool fees and local residents' income levels affect the actual enrollment rates in early childhood education remains understudied. In particular, there is a need to investigate the relative influence of private preschool fee costs and residents' income levels on actual pre-primary enrollment rates in Ibadan North Local Government Area.

Addressing this issue is especially important for the educational planning, policy making, and overall early

childhood development in Oyo State. The information on the degree to which fees are a limiting factor, and to what extent the students' parents are able to cover them will enable the state's policymakers, private school owners, and administrators to make informed decisions regarding developing strategies to balance school fees, provide subsidies, and establish partnerships with private providers in order to ensure affordability and accessibility of pre-primary education. While extensive literature documents general attitudes toward ECE costs, empirical quantification of how fee structures and income directly impact actual enrollment rates in municipal centers like Ibadan North remains scant.

Research questions

Research question one: To what extent do private school fees influence the enrollment of pre-primary school pupils in Ibadan North Local Government Area?

Research question two: To what extent does household income influence the enrollment of pre-primary school pupils in Ibadan North Local Government Area?

Hypotheses

HO₁: There is no significant relationship between private school fees and pre-primary school pupils' enrollment.

HO₂: There is no significant relationship between household income and pre-primary school pupils' enrollment.

HO₃: There is no significant joint contribution of private school fees and household income to pre-primary school pupils' enrollment.

HO₄: There is no significant difference in enrollment impacts between public pre-primary sections and private preschool centers based on institutional fee structures

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a correlational survey research design to collect data from multiple variables to examine the direction and magnitude of the relationships between the variables without manipulating any of the independent variables. The target population for this study was parents of children studying in pre-primary schools in Ibadan North Local Government Area. To ensure that the sample size was sufficient to represent the entire population of parents and caregivers in the study area while avoiding sampling bias between public and private institutions, a multi-stage sampling technique was adopted. Stage One involved the selection of ten early childhood education centers (five public primary schools with pre-primary sections and five private preschools) from the local government area using

a simple random sampling technique. Stage Two involved selecting a sample of 200 respondents (100 parents from public early learning centers and 100 parents from private pre-reading schools). This study used a survey research design to investigate the parent population; the study's retrospective nature implied that its focus was on enrolling students in the pre-reading term rather than at the beginning of their learning careers. For this study, two instruments were designed and validated as reliable and effective measurement tools. The first instrument, the Questionnaire on Parents' Socio-Economic Factors (QPSEF), was used to measure the respondents' socio-economic backgrounds, including their children's age, household income, sources of income, and level of education. The second tool, the Parents' Questionnaire on the Influence of Household Income and Private School Fees on Pupils' Enrollment (PQIHPCPE), was developed to capture the influence of parents' income and private school fees on pupils' enrollment. The questionnaire had 14 items (each rated on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree (4) to Strongly Disagree (1) grouped into two subscales (cost implications and household income dynamics). The PQIHPCPE had two subscales with seven items each (Items 1-7 reflected cost implications, and Items 8-14 reflected household income dynamics). To operationalize the dependent variable (pupils' enrollment) and meet the requirements of statistical parametric tests (correlation and regression analysis), a composite enrollment index was calculated for each respondent. The

enrollment index was computed by aggregating the scores of a 20-item checklist (on a 4-point Likert scale) to reflect the respondents' entry regularity, attendance consistency, and retention capacity. The computed scores ranged from 20 to 80 (with 20 indicating very low and 80 indicating very high enrollment). Both questionnaires were validated by selected measurement and evaluation experts for face, content, and construct validity. The instruments demonstrated extremely high internal consistency (Cronbach's Alpha for QPSEF: $\alpha = 0.81$; Cronbach's Alpha for PQIHPCPE: $\alpha = 0.86$).

The data gathered using the research instruments were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics at a .05 level of significance. The descriptive procedures included calculating frequencies, percentages, item means, and weighted averages to respond to the research questions. The inferential statistical procedures included Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (to establish the degree of association between variables), Multiple Regression Analysis (to predict the outcome variable using the identified predictors), and an Independent Samples t-test (to compare the means of the independent and control variables).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research question one: To what extent do private school fees influence the enrollment of pre-primary school pupils?

Table 1. Descriptive analysis of the extent to which private school fees influence the enrollment of pre-primary school pupils.

S/N	Items	SD	D	A	SA	Mean	Std. Dev.
1	Due to cost implications, private pre-primary schools risk lower enrollment than public schools.	8 (4.0%)	39 (19.5%)	81 (40.5%)	72 (36.0%)	3.09	0.85
2	Quality and services in private schools enhance enrollment despite higher fees.	11 (5.5%)	30 (15.0%)	86 (43.0%)	73 (36.5%)	3.11	0.84
3	Rising private fees make early education accessible only to wealthy families.	5 (2.5%)	9 (4.5%)	77 (38.5%)	109 (54.5%)	3.45	0.69
4	Government grants/scholarships are necessary to maintain equitable early access.	10 (5.0%)	30 (15.0%)	70 (35.0%)	90 (45.0%)	3.20	0.87
5	Private education benefits have not fully resolved regional enrollment challenges.	4 (2.0%)	10 (5.0%)	96 (48.0%)	90 (45.0%)	3.36	0.68
6	Higher-income public school graduates still prefer private early centers for their wards.	11 (5.5%)	10 (5.0%)	113 (56.5%)	66 (33.0%)	3.17	0.74
7	There is a direct perceived influence of education cost on choice of early enrollment.	3 (1.5%)	3 (1.5%)	87 (43.5%)	107 (53.5%)	3.49	0.61
Overall	Weighted Average (WA) = 3.50 (High Extent)	—	—	—	—	3.50	High Extent

Low Level (1.00 – 2.49), Moderate Level (2.50 – 2.99), High Level (3.00 – 4.00)

As shown in Table 1, parents expressed a strong agreement that private school fees play a high descriptive role in early educational choices (WA = 3.50). A detailed

explanation reveals that parents in Ibadan North Local Government Area overwhelmingly perceive private preschool fees as a major factor influencing early

childhood education access, with item means ranging consistently between 3.09 and 3.49 on a 4.00-point scale. The overall weighted average of 3.50 underscores a strong collective consensus that financial obligations play a defining role in shaping family decision-making and enrollment dynamics at the pre-primary level. The reason why this particular range was chosen is because getting a mean score of 2.50 would be a mathematical center of a 4-point Likert scale. Thus, any overall weighted mean or mean of item scores that is equal to or higher than 3 would suggest that there is an overwhelming level of agreement (i.e., high in the range of possible responses), which would justify designating such a mean as indicating a “High Extent” of parental influence.

The strongest level of agreement was recorded for Item 7, which addresses the direct perceived influence of educational costs on early enrollment choices. Registering the highest mean score of 3.49 and a narrow standard deviation of 0.61, over 97% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that overall tuition and fee requirements are top-of-mind considerations when selecting an early learning center. Item 3 recorded a mean of 3.45 (SD = 0.69), with over 93% of parents affirming that continuous increases in private fees risk making quality pre-primary education accessible almost exclusively to affluent families, thereby deepening socio-economic inequities in foundational care. Furthermore, Item 5 yielded a mean of 3.36 (SD = 0.68), reflecting a broad agreement among 93% of respondents that despite the widespread growth of private centers across the local government area, private provision alone has not fully overcome regional enrollment barriers.

This financial pressure drives a strong expectation for public intervention, as demonstrated by Item 4. With a mean score of 3.20 (SD = 0.87), 80% of surveyed parents agreed that government grants, operational subsidies, or targeted scholarships are necessary to maintain equitable access to early education for all children. Despite these cost concerns, parental aspirations for quality remain high. Item 6 returned a mean of 3.17 (SD = 0.74), showing that nearly 90% of parents observe a strong preference for private early centers even among households with public school backgrounds. Similarly, Item 2 recorded a mean of 3.11 (SD = 0.84), with 79.5% of respondents agreeing that superior facility quality, lower child-to-teacher ratios, and structured learning environments motivate parents to enroll their children in private centers even when fee schedules are elevated.

Finally, Item 1 examined the competitive vulnerability of private providers, recording a mean score of 3.09 (SD = 0.85). While this item had the lowest relative score in the table, 76.5% of parents still agreed that steep tuition charges place private centers at risk of lower enrollment or student transfers to public alternatives. Taken together in prose form, these item means illustrate a clear narrative: while quality care acts as a powerful pull factor for parents, escalating fees create real affordability concerns, leading to a strong call for supportive government policies to stabilize early childhood education access across the region.

Research question two: To what extent does household income influence the enrollment of pre-primary school pupils?

Table 2. Descriptive analysis of the extent to which household income influence the enrollment of pre-primary school pupils.

S/N	Items	SD	D	A	SA	Mean	Std. Dev.
1	Household income strata dictate access to private early childhood education.	8 (4.0%)	32 (16.0%)	106 (53.0%)	54 (27.0%)	3.03	0.77
2	High socio-economic parents sometimes prefer public early centers over private ones.	47 (23.5%)	75 (37.5%)	59 (29.5%)	19 (9.5%)	2.25	0.92
3	Low-income children are often excluded from premium private preschool opportunities.	9 (4.5%)	25 (12.5%)	120 (60.0%)	46 (23.0%)	3.02	0.72
4	Non-wage financial sources significantly assist families in paying preschool fees.	9 (4.5%)	20 (10.0%)	124 (62.0%)	47 (23.5%)	3.05	0.70
5	Parents prioritize early childhood funding even during severe economic constraints.	8 (4.0%)	20 (10.0%)	104 (52.0%)	68 (34.0%)	3.16	0.75
6	Parental engagement increases satisfaction and retention in private preschools.	22 (11.0%)	49 (24.5%)	87 (43.5%)	42 (21.0%)	2.75	0.91
7	School discipline and structured learning encourage sustained parental investment.	24 (12.0%)	48 (24.0%)	78 (39.0%)	50 (25.0%)	2.77	0.96
Overall	Weighted Average (WA) = 2.90 (High Extent)	—	—	—	—	2.90	High Extent

The descriptive findings indicate that parents perceive household income as having a high extent of influence on

early school enrollment (WA = 2.90). An analysis of the item means in Table 2 reveals that parents in Ibadan North

Local Government Area perceive household income as having a notable influence on early childhood education enrollment choices, with individual item means spanning from 2.25 to 3.16 and an overall weighted average of 2.90 on a 4.00-point scale. This overall average indicates that, on a descriptive level, family income levels and economic capacity are recognized as important factors in navigating pre-primary school decisions.

The highest level of agreement was observed for Item 5, which measures the priority parents place on early learning despite financial strain. Registering a mean score of 3.16 and a standard deviation of 0.75, 86% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that parents actively prioritize funding early childhood education even when facing severe economic constraints. Following closely, Item 4 recorded a mean of 3.05 (SD = 0.70), with 85.5% of parents agreeing that non-wage financial sources such as extended family support or informal credit significantly assist households in meeting private preschool fee commitments. In addition, Item 1 yielded a mean of 3.03 (SD = 0.77), where 80% of respondents affirmed that household income strata directly dictate a family's capacity to access private early childhood centers. Similarly, Item 3 returned a mean score of 3.02 (SD = 0.72), with 83% of parents agreeing that children from low-income backgrounds face increased risk of exclusion from

premium private preschool options due to budget limits.

The remaining items in the table capture broader behavioral dynamics linked to household investment in early education. Item 7 recorded a mean score of 2.77 (SD = 0.96), with 64% of respondents agreeing that established school discipline and structured learning environments motivate parents to sustain their financial commitment. Likewise, Item 6 yielded a mean of 2.75 (SD = 0.91), showing that 64.5% of parents believe active parental engagement enhances overall satisfaction and student retention in private centers. In contrast, the lowest score in Table 2 was recorded for Item 2, which evaluated whether high socio-economic status parents prefer public early childhood centers over private options. With a mean of 2.25 (SD = 0.92) and 61% of respondents disagreeing or strongly disagreeing, this was the only item in the section to fall below the 2.50 benchmark criterion. This lower mean confirms that high-income families rarely opt for public pre-primary centers when private options are financially feasible.

Testing hypotheses

HO₁: There is no significant relationship between private school fees and pre-primary school pupils' enrollment

Table 3. Summary of PPMC showing the relationship between private school fees and pre-primary school pupils' enrollment.

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	r-value	Sig. (p)	Decision
Private fees	24.50	3.64	-0.030	0.833	Not Significant
Pupils' enrollment	59.60	4.54			

The correlation coefficient ($r = -0.030$, $p = 0.833 > 0.05$) indicates no statistically significant relationship between private school fees and enrollment; hence, HO₁ is accepted.

HO₂: There is no significant relationship between household income and pre-primary school pupils' enrollment.

Table 4. Significant relationship between household income and pre-primary school pupils' enrollment.

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	r-value	Sig. (p)	Decision
Household income	20.30	3.62	-0.090	0.449	Not Significant
Pupils' enrollment	59.60	4.55			

The correlation analysis reveals an insignificant inverse relationship ($r = -0.090$, $p = 0.449 > 0.05$). HO₂ is accepted, confirming that household income level does not directly dictate actual pre-primary enrollment rates in the sampled area.

HO₃: There is no significant joint contribution of private school fees and household income to pre-primary school pupils' enrollment.

Table 5. Summary of Regression Analysis showing the relative and joint contributions of private school fees and household income to pre-primary school pupils' enrollment.

Model coefficients	Unstandardized B	Std. Error	Standardized β	t-value	Sig. (p)	Remark
(Constant)	50.246	4.055	—	12.392	0.000	Significant
Private Fees	-0.184	0.874	-0.025	-0.211	0.834	Not Significant
Household Income	-0.820	1.078	-0.092	-0.761	0.449	Not Significant

Regression Model Summary: $R = 0.095$, $R^2 = 0.009$, Adjusted $R^2 = -0.001$, $F_{(2, 197)} = 0.319$, $p = 0.728$ ($p > 0.05$)

The multiple regression analysis indicates that neither private school fees ($\beta = -0.025$, $t = -0.211$, $p > 0.05$) nor household income ($\beta = -0.092$, $t = -0.761$, $p > 0.05$) yielded a statistically significant relative contribution to enrollment rates. Furthermore, their joint contribution was statistically insignificant ($F_{(2, 197)} = 0.319$, $p = 0.728$), accounting for less than 1% of the total variance ($R^2 = 0.009$), therefore, H_{O3} is accepted.

Note: The near-zero R^2 (0.009) and slightly negative Adjusted R^2 (-0.001) confirm that the joint interaction of private fees and household income holds virtually zero predictive power over actual pre-primary enrollment rates in the sample population

HO₄: There is no significant difference in enrollment impacts between public pre-primary sections and private preschool centers based on institutional fee structures.

Table 6. Independent Samples t-test showing differences in enrollment impacts between public pre-primary sections and private preschool centers based on institutional fee structures.

School category	n	Mean Score	Std. Dev.	df	t-value	Sig. (p)	Decision
Public pre-primary sections	100	29.83	8.73	198	0.842	0.401	Not Significant
Private preschool centers	100	27.73	9.82				

The t-test yielded $t_{(198)} = 0.842$, $p = 0.401 > 0.05$, indicating no statistically significant difference in enrollment impacts based on fee structures between institutional types, hence H_{O4} is accepted.

note, Chukwuma and Suleiman (2025) found that parents in urban areas base their financial expectations on the perception of the value of early care, constantly balancing the costs against their economic capacity before making enrollment decisions.

DISCUSSION

Perceived high influence of private preschool fees on enrollment

The descriptive finding that private school fees influence pre-primary enrollment to a very large extent ($WA = 3.50\%$) reflects the rising financial challenges facing urban parents in Southwestern Nigeria. Parents surveyed strongly agreed that the increases pose a social barrier, dictate early school choices, and threaten private pre-primary institutions with enrollment risks. The descriptive finding aligns with the observation of Gbadamosi and Adeleke (2026), who found that rising fees and additional administrative payments in private pre-primary institutions across urban Nigeria have caused financial worries for many middle-class and low-income families. In another finding, the Nigeria Education Research and Development Council [NERDC] (2024) noted that inflation and rising operational costs have increased the fees charged by private pre-primary schools, causing parents to perceive the expense as a social status determinant. On the same

Perceived influence of household income and parental resilience

The finding that parents identified family income as one of the primary factors that influence enrollment in early childhood education ($WA = 2.90$) points to the importance of financial capability in accessing preschool. Indeed, the item-level analysis revealed parents' strong resilience to financial hardship in terms of pursuing early years schooling. For instance, respondents agreed (Mean = 3.16) that they tend to value early childhood education more during financial difficulties. Besides, they also strongly agreed (Mean = 3.05) that they use available alternative sources of income to afford toddler education fees. The tendency of parents to prioritize early schooling despite low-income levels has been attributed to their understanding of the benefits of pre-primary education (Adebawale and Ogundele, 2025). According to Adebawale and Ogundele (2025), families with limited income set aside some financial provisions for pre-primary education before spending on other needs, particularly in

urban Nigeria. Similarly, Nwachukwu and Mensah (2024) found that informal supports and solidarity among family members and friends enable low- and middle-income families to maintain early childhood education for their toddlers. In the same way, Kazeem and Alade (2025) reported that parents' desire for quality pre-primary education often overrides their financial levels. As a result, the respondents used alternative sources of income to fund their children's early years education.

In contrast to the descriptive results, the inferential analysis revealed that the impact of private school fees ($\beta = -0.025$, $p = 0.834$) and parental income ($\beta = -0.092$, $p = 0.449$) on pre-primary enrollment rates was statistically non-significant at both individual and combined levels ($F = 0.319$, $p = 0.728$, $R^2 = 0.009$), thereby accepting H_{O1} , H_{O2} , and H_{O3} . This suggests that despite parents' concerns about the financial implications of pre-primary education, enrollment levels are relatively insensitive to price changes in Ibadan North. Within the statistical parameters of this sample, private school fees and household income did not yield significant predictive weights on enrollment variance, suggesting a high degree of perceived price resilience among urban parents. According to the findings of Akinsanya et al. (2024), who examined the enrollment patterns of Nigerian urban households using an econometric approach, child enrollment is not significantly affected by per capita income and direct expenditure on education since education is perceived as a mandatory item by parents. In other words, parents do not respond elastically to the price changes of early childhood education as they view it as a fundamental aspect of human capital development. Similar arguments were advanced by Olatunji and Ibrahim (2024) in that pre-primary education is considered an essential step towards gaining cognitive skills and hence parents are more willing to adjust their budgets than to deprive their children of this right.

Comparative impact of public and private fee structures on enrollment

The inferential test of the fourth null hypothesis H_{O4} showed that there is no significant difference in the enrollment effect based on the fee structure between public and private pre-primary centers ($t = 0.842$, $p = 0.401$). This suggests that the difference in the fee structure has no significant influence on enrollment decisions in public and private pre-primary education. This finding supports the conclusion of Akintunde and Olaniyi (2021) that the choice of early childhood care and education centers in Oyo State is guided by proximity, the quality of services, and safety features and not the fee structure. Similarly, Ezenwa and Adebayo (2023) found that even though public pre-primary centers have lower fees, parents still choose private pre-primary schools in Western Nigeria because of the benefits associated with

them, including good learning environments, routines, and foundational literacy skills. Therefore, policymakers in Oyo State must consider factors other than the fee structure in promoting enrollment in pre-primary education.

The finding that pre-primary enrollment rates are statistically price-inelastic, operating separately from private fee structures and household income, challenges traditional consumer choice paradigms but resonates with recent empirical work in developing contexts. Within Nigeria, similar pattern was found by Adebowale and Ogundele (2025) and Kazeem and Alade (2025) who posited that price-inelastic pre-primary enrollment demand, as reported by urban Nigerian parents in Southwestern states frequently perceive early childhood education as an essential human capital investment, even when facing fiscal strain or relying on informal safety nets to maintain enrollment. In these contexts, Akinsanya et al. (2024) similarly observe that Nigerian urban household educational expenditures exhibit little responsiveness to fee variations, as foundational learning is often prioritized as a quasi-obligatory allocation. Beyond Nigeria, these findings find parallels in other developing and emerging economies with significant private-sector provision of early childhood education. For example, analyses of pre-primary markets in East and Southern Africa (e.g., Kenya: Kiumi et al., 2023; South Africa: Mestry, 2022) also identify enrollment rates resistant to fee pressures, as parents perceive private preschools as offering superior pedagogical quality and discipline. These findings contrast sharply with high-income OECD nations (Vandenbroeck and Lazzari, 2014; OECD, 2023), where public financing dominates pre-primary education, rendering family demand highly sensitive to out-of-pocket fee structures. This international divergence highlights the unique dynamics of mixed, market-driven early childhood systems in urban African settings, where parental aspirations for child cognitive development frequently override immediate macroeconomic and fee constraints.

CONCLUSION

Based on these empirical findings, the study concludes that while parents in Ibadan North Local Government Area perceive private preschool fees and household income as substantial operational challenges, these financial variables do not statistically dictate actual pre-primary enrollment rates. Parental choice and early school enrollment are resilient to cost variations, driven largely by parental recognition of early childhood education as a fundamental prerequisite for lifelong learning and academic success.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Ministry of Education should formulate regulatory

frameworks for monitoring instructional quality, learning infrastructure and teacher training in private pre-primary institutions, ensuring value for money on fees paid.

- Government should develop incentives to subsidize charges by private pre-primary institutions through below-market-rate operational grants or provision of subsidized instructional materials.
- Local Authorities should educate their communities on the need for pre-primary education to ensure they continue to send their children to both private and government pre-primary institutions.
- Education authorities should develop support schemes for vulnerable groups to cushion the effects of withdrawing children from pre-primary education in the wake of widespread economic crises.

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