



ASSESSING THE EFFECT OF STRATEGIC POSITIONING ON INSTITUTIONAL COMPETITIVENESS OF SELECTED PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES IN SOUTHWEST NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the effect of strategic positioning on institutional competitiveness among selected private universities in Southwest Nigeria. An observational cross-sectional research design based on secondary institutional data was adopted. The population comprised 53 accredited private universities in Southwest Nigeria, but limited to 25 private universities with publicly accessible institutional disclosures, and a census approach was employed. Data were extracted from official university websites, National Universities Commission records, ranking platforms, and other publicly available institutional sources using a researcher-developed coding framework. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics and multiple regression analysis. Given the census of 25 institutions and the associated statistical-power constraint, the regression results were interpreted as exploratory evidence within the defined study population. Robust HC3 standard errors were also employed as a sensitivity check, with no substantive changes in the decisions regarding the hypotheses. The findings indicated that strategic positioning significantly influences institutional competitiveness, with the dimensions collectively accounting for a substantial proportion of the variation in competitiveness among the universities studied. Specifically, programme differentiation and brand/reputation positioning exerted positive and statistically significant effects on institutional competitiveness, suggesting that universities with distinctive academic offerings, stronger reputational capital, and enhanced institutional visibility are more likely to achieve superior competitive outcomes. Conversely, infrastructure positioning and digital/innovation positioning, although positively associated with institutional competitiveness, did not demonstrate statistically significant effects in the regression model. The study concludes that strategic positioning is an important determinant of institutional competitiveness, with programme differentiation and brand/reputation positioning emerging as the most influential strategic drivers. Private universities should therefore prioritize programme diversification and institutional branding to strengthen their competitive standing.

1.0 Introduction

In the contemporary knowledge economy, the long-term relevance and sustainability of higher education institutions increasingly depend on their ability to develop distinctive strategic identities that align with evolving stakeholder expectations and dynamic competitive environments. As universities compete not only for students but also for research funding, global recognition, academic talent, and institutional partnerships, strategic positioning has become a fundamental determinant of institutional success rather than merely an administrative function.

Higher education institutions globally increasingly operate in competitive and market-driven environments shaped by globalization, technological disruption, rising stakeholder expectations, and intensified rivalry for students, reputation, and institutional legitimacy (Altbach et al., 2017; Marginson, 2006). In response, universities are adopting strategic management practices traditionally associated with corporate organizations to secure competitive advantage and sustain institutional relevance (Kotler & Fox, 1995). Among these, strategic positioning has emerged as a critical imperative through which institutions differentiate themselves via academic offerings, infrastructure, branding, innovation, and reputation management (Kolluru, 2024). Strategic positioning involves the deliberate deployment of organizational resources and strategic choices to establish a unique and defensible position relative to competitors (Porter, 1985; David & David, 2023).

In Africa, the liberalization and expansion of private higher education have intensified competition among universities, compelling institutions to adopt more market-oriented strategic behaviours to remain viable and attractive (Tamrat, W., & Teferra, 2025; Materu, 2023). Similar trends are evident in Nigeria, where the rapid growth of private universities has heightened inter-institutional rivalry, particularly in Southwest Nigeria; a region with a high concentration of private universities and strong demand for tertiary education (National Universities Commission [NUC], 2026). Consequently, institutions increasingly compete on academic reputation, programme diversity, infrastructure, graduate employability, tuition pricing, and digital capabilities.

Despite the strategic significance of positioning in this context, existing Nigerian studies on university competitiveness have largely examined the phenomenon from educational management and consumer-behaviour perspectives, emphasizing service quality, institutional image, student perception, and satisfaction (Borishade et al., 2021). This has left limited empirical understanding of how strategic positioning, as a strategic management construct, influences institutional competitiveness among private universities. This study therefore assesses the effect of strategic positioning on institutional competitiveness among selected private universities in Southwest Nigeria through a strategic management lens.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The rapid expansion of private universities in Nigeria has intensified competition, particularly in Southwest Nigeria where institutional concentration is high. Despite strategic investments in branding, programme diversification, infrastructure, and digital innovation, disparities persist in institutional competitiveness, suggesting uneven strategic effectiveness (NUC, 2026; Falola et al., 2016). However, existing Nigerian studies largely overlook strategic positioning as a determinant of competitiveness, creating the need for this study (Borishade et al., 2021).

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of this study is to assess the effect of strategic positioning on institutional competitiveness of selected private universities in Southwest Nigeria. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. examine the effect of programme differentiation on institutional competitiveness of selected private universities in Southwest Nigeria;

2. determine the effect of brand positioning on institutional competitiveness of selected private universities in Southwest Nigeria;
3. assess the effect of infrastructure positioning on institutional competitiveness of selected private universities in Southwest Nigeria;
4. evaluate the effect of digital positioning on institutional competitiveness of selected private universities in Southwest Nigeria.

1.4 Research Questions

The study provides answers to the following research questions:

1. What effect does programme differentiation have on institutional competitiveness of selected private universities in Southwest Nigeria?
2. To what extent does brand positioning affect institutional competitiveness of selected private universities in Southwest Nigeria?
3. How does infrastructure positioning influence institutional competitiveness of selected private universities in Southwest Nigeria?
4. What effect does digital positioning have on institutional competitiveness of selected private universities in Southwest Nigeria?

1.5 Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses are formulated for the study and will be tested:

H₀₁: Programme differentiation has no significant effect on institutional competitiveness of selected private universities in Southwest Nigeria.

H₀₂: Brand positioning has no significant effect on institutional competitiveness of selected private universities in Southwest Nigeria.

H₀₃: Infrastructure positioning has no significant effect on institutional competitiveness of selected private universities in Southwest Nigeria.

H₀₄: Digital positioning has no significant effect on institutional competitiveness of selected private universities in Southwest Nigeria.

2.0 Conceptual Review

2.1 Institutional Competitiveness

Institutional competitiveness denotes the extent to which an institution achieves superior strategic and market outcomes relative to competitors through effective deployment of strategic resources and capabilities. In higher education, it reflects a university's ability to sustain market attractiveness, enhance visibility, improve rankings, attract students, and maintain institutional prominence (Piatanom, 2025). Given limited financial disclosures among private universities, this study measures institutional competitiveness using observable proxies; ranking visibility, enrollment attractiveness, programme growth, and institutional prominence, consistent with recent higher education competitiveness literature (EUA, 2025; Piatanom, 2025).

2.2 Strategic Positioning

Strategic positioning refers to the deliberate deployment of an organization's resources, capabilities, and strategic choices to establish a distinctive and defensible position relative to competitors (David & David, 2023; Pitelis et. al. 2024). In

higher education, it reflects how universities differentiate themselves through academic offerings, reputation, infrastructure, and technological advancement to enhance competitiveness (Kolluru, 2024). This study operationalizes strategic positioning through programme differentiation, brand/reputation positioning, infrastructure positioning, and digital/innovation positioning (Piatanom, 2025).

2.3 Theoretical Review

This study draws primarily on Positioning Theory and the Resource-Based View (RBV) to explain how strategic positioning influences institutional competitiveness. Positioning Theory posits that organizations achieve superior performance by occupying distinctive and defensible market positions through strategic differentiation (Porter, 1980, 1985), making it relevant for explaining how universities leverage programme offerings, reputation, infrastructure, and innovation to enhance competitiveness. RBV complements this by emphasizing the strategic role of valuable institutional resources in enabling competitiveness (Barney, 1991). However, Positioning Theory underpins this study due to its stronger alignment with the study's focus on market-facing strategic differentiation.

2.4 Empirical Review

Empirical studies in recent times provide growing evidence that strategic management practices influence competitiveness and performance in higher education institutions, although extant findings remain fragmented across strategic dimensions. Tyas and Ady (2024) examined the effect of differentiation strategy on competitive advantage at Dr. Soetomo University using data collected from 126 university staff through a structured questionnaire. Applying Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), the study found that differentiation strategy significantly enhances competitive advantage and institutional sustainability. The study, however, focused on a single university and therefore offers limited generalizability beyond its institutional context. In a related study, Piatanom (2025) assessed programme diversification and institutional strategic performance among 87 higher education institutions across Southeast Asia using panel secondary data and regression analysis. The findings revealed that programme diversification and curricular uniqueness significantly improve institutional attractiveness and strategic performance. Nonetheless, the study did not examine broader strategic positioning dimensions beyond programme differentiation.

With respect to digital strategy, Sun et al. (2025) investigated the effect of digital transformation on faculty performance using survey data from 482 faculty members across multiple higher education institutions in China. Using structural equation modeling, the study found that digital transformation significantly and positively predicts faculty performance and institutional responsiveness. Similarly, Carmo et al. (2025) examined digital transformation in university management across 64 European universities using mixed methods and found that digital transformation improves operational efficiency, administrative responsiveness, and institutional competitiveness. Complementing this operational view, Gasmalla et al. (2025) demonstrate that structural digital optimization directly influences global visibility and performance metrics. Their strategic framework utilizes target metrics such as openness, visibility, and excellence to systematically correct institutional digital vulnerabilities. Together, these studies show that operational digital maturity and calculated web positioning are deeply codependent strategies essential for securing global institutional competitiveness. However, these studies focused primarily on digitalization without integrating broader strategic positioning dimensions.

African studies further support the strategy-performance relationship. Duodu (2025) examined strategic management practices and performance among 38 private university colleges in Ghana using survey data collected from senior administrators and analyzed through regression techniques. The study found that strategic management practices positively influence institutional performance, particularly where strategic implementation mechanisms are formalized.

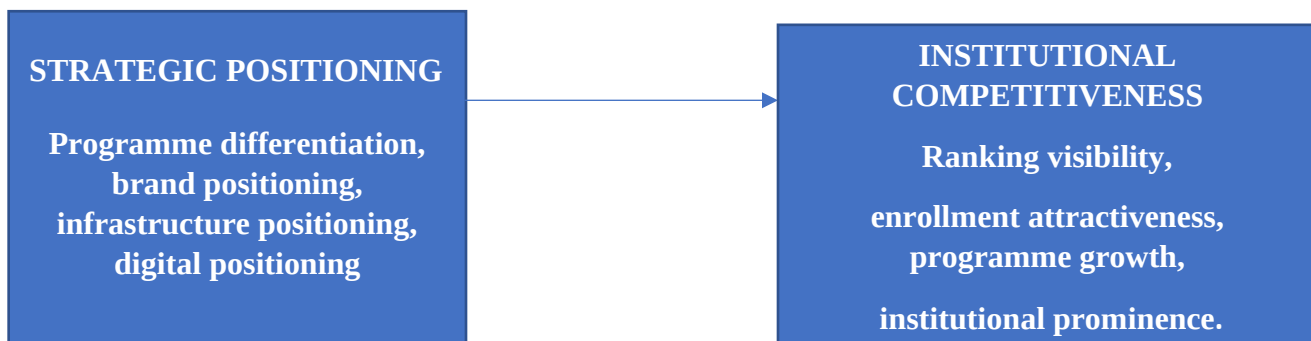
Within Nigeria, Falola et. al. (2016) examined the influence of branding and marketing strategies on enrollment performance among 15 private universities in Southwest Nigeria using survey and institutional data analyzed through

regression analysis. The study found that branding and digital visibility significantly enhance enrollment attractiveness and institutional visibility. Borishade et al. (2021) also found that service quality significantly predicts student satisfaction among private universities in Nigeria using survey data from 385 students. However, these Nigerian studies focus predominantly on isolated marketing and perception variables rather than integrated strategic positioning constructs and largely assess student-level outcomes instead of institution-level competitiveness.

Overall, the reviewed empirical studies indicate that strategy-related variables, including strategic planning, differentiation, branding, digitalization, and strategic management practices, positively influence institutional performance and competitiveness. However, the literature remains fragmented in three major respects. First, most studies examine isolated strategic dimensions rather than integrated strategic positioning frameworks. Second, many rely on perceptual primary survey data rather than objective institutional-level indicators. Third, limited empirical evidence exists in Southwest Nigeria on how programme differentiation, brand/reputation positioning, infrastructure positioning, and digital/innovation positioning jointly influence institutional competitiveness among private universities. It is this gap that the present study seeks to address.

2.5 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework explains the presumed relationship between strategic positioning and institutional competitiveness among selected private universities in Southwest Nigeria. Strategic positioning, treated as the independent construct, comprises programme differentiation, brand positioning, infrastructure positioning, and digital positioning, representing the key ways universities create uniqueness and strengthen market relevance. Institutional competitiveness, the dependent construct, is reflected through ranking visibility, enrollment attractiveness, programme growth, and institutional prominence. Anchored on Positioning Theory, the framework posits that universities occupying distinctive and defensible market positions achieve superior competitive outcomes. Accordingly, the model assumes that each dimension of strategic positioning exerts a direct positive effect on institutional competitiveness.



Independent Variable: Strategic Positioning

- i. Programme Differentiation
- ii. Brand Positioning
- iii. Infrastructure Positioning
- iv. Digital Positioning

Dependent Variable: Institutional Competitiveness

- i. Ranking Visibility
- ii. Enrollment Attractiveness

- iii. Programme Growth
- iv. Institutional Prominence

3.0 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted an observational cross-sectional research design based on secondary institutional data. The design is appropriate because the study analyses publicly available institutional characteristics measured at a single point in time without manipulation of the variables. The population of the study comprised all National Universities Commission (NUC)-approved private universities located in Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Osun, Ondo and Ekiti States, constituting the South-West geopolitical zone of Nigeria. As at 31 December 2025, the NUC register identified 53 private universities established within the six states. However, because the study relied exclusively on secondary institutional information, an eligibility screening was conducted based on the availability, accessibility and comparability of institutional disclosures required for the measurement of the study variables. Following the screening, 25 universities met the inclusion criteria and constituted the analytical population. A census approach was subsequently adopted, whereby all 25 eligible universities were included in the study. This approach ensured that the analysis was based on institutions for which the required secondary data that permits the examination of associations between strategic positioning and institutional competitiveness, could be consistently obtained and compared. The design therefore supports institutional-level comparison within the defined population while avoiding claims of experimental causality. The analysis is interpreted as evidence of statistical association/predictive contribution rather than proof of causal effects.

3.2 Population of the study

The population of the study comprised twenty-five (25) accredited private universities located in Southwest Nigeria with publicly accessible institutional disclosures and performance-related information suitable for secondary-data analysis. These universities were identified from the official list of accredited private universities published by the National Universities Commission (NUC, 2026) and screened based on the availability of institutional data across official university websites, ranking platforms, and public institutional disclosures. Given the manageable population size and the accessibility of relevant data for all identified institutions, the study adopted a census approach, covering the entire population.

Although the number of cases ($N = 25$) is small for conventional multiple-regression applications, the figure represents the complete accessible population defined by the study rather than a small sample drawn from that population. Nevertheless, the study does not claim that census coverage removes the statistical-power limitation. Green (1991) cautions against relying on simple sample-size rules and emphasizes power considerations in regression. Accordingly, the present regression analysis is treated as exploratory within the defined population, and emphasis is placed on effect sizes, adjusted R^2 , diagnostic tests, robust standard errors, and cautious interpretation rather than broad statistical generalization beyond the study population.

Data were collected from secondary sources including official university websites, National Universities Commission accreditation records, Webometrics rankings, uniRank institutional profiles, institutional reports, admission portals, and other publicly available institutional disclosures. The independent variable, strategic positioning, was operationalized through four dimensions: programme differentiation, brand/reputation positioning, infrastructure positioning, and digital/innovation positioning. The dependent variable, institutional competitiveness, was measured using publicly observable indicators comprising ranking visibility, enrollment attractiveness, programme growth, and institutional prominence. Composite indices were developed for each construct based on coded institutional data extracted from the identified sources.

The population of the study comprised twenty-five (25) accredited private universities located in Southwest Nigeria with publicly accessible institutional disclosures suitable for secondary-data analysis. The institutions included in the study are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Selected Private Universities

S/N	Private University	Location (State)	Source of Identification / Verification
1	Babcock University	Ogun State	NUC (2026); Official University Website
2	Covenant University	Ogun State	NUC (2026); Official University Website
3	Bells University of Technology	Ogun State	NUC (2026); Official University Website
4	Crawford University	Ogun State	NUC (2026); Official University Website
5	Redeemer's University	Ogun State	NUC (2026); Official University Website
6	McPherson University	Ogun State	NUC (2026); Official University Website
7	Mountain Top University	Ogun State	NUC (2026); Official University Website
8	Chrisland University	Ogun State	NUC (2026); Official University Website
9	Southwestern University	Ogun State	NUC (2026); Official University Website
10	Pan-Atlantic University	Lagos State	NUC (2026); Official University Website
11	Caleb University	Lagos State	NUC (2026); Official University Website
12	Augustine University	Lagos State	NUC (2026); Official University Website
13	Anchor University	Lagos State	NUC (2026); Official University Website
14	Ajayi Crowther University	Oyo State	NUC (2026); Official University Website
15	Lead City University	Oyo State	NUC (2026); Official University Website
16	Dominican University	Oyo State	NUC (2026); Official University Website
17	KolaDaisi University	Oyo State	NUC (2026); Official University Website
18	Bowen University	Osun State	NUC (2026); Official University Website
19	Adeleke University	Osun State	NUC (2026); Official University Website
20	Fountain University	Osun State	NUC (2026); Official University Website
21	Joseph Ayo Babalola University	Osun State	NUC (2026); Official University Website
22	Oduduwa University	Osun State	NUC (2026); Official University Website
23	Elizade University	Ondo State	NUC (2026); Official University Website
24	Achievers University	Ondo State	NUC (2026); Official University Website
25	Afe Babalola University	Ekiti State	NUC (2026); Official University Website

Source: Compiled by the Researcher (2026) from National Universities Commission (NUC) Accredited Private Universities List and Official Institutional Websites.

As presented in Table 1, the study covered all twenty-five accredited private universities in Southwest Nigeria with publicly accessible institutional disclosures relevant to the variables under investigation. The adoption of the census approach enhances the comprehensiveness of the study and eliminates sampling bias associated with partial institutional selection.

3.3 Data Sources and Method of Data Collection

Data for this study were obtained from secondary sources through systematic extraction of publicly available institutional information on selected private universities in Southwest Nigeria. Sources included official university websites, NUC accreditation records, ranking platforms, admission portals, and institutional disclosures. Using a structured coding template, relevant data were reviewed, coded, and transformed into composite indicators for strategic positioning and institutional competitiveness, ensuring consistency, comparability, and objectivity across institutions.

Table 2: Operationalization of Variables

Variable	Dimension	Proxy / Measurement Indicator	Data Source	Measurement Approach	Adapted From
Strategic Positioning	Programme Differentiation	Number/diversity of accredited programmes; presence of unique/specialized programmes	University Websites; NUC Accreditation Records	Count / Composite Index	Piatanom (2025);
	Brand Positioning	Ranking presence/position; institutional awards/recognitions; media visibility	Webometrics; uniRank; Institutional Disclosures	Composite Reputation Index	Global University Rankings Study (2025)
	Infrastructure Positioning	Quality/availability of campus facilities, laboratories, libraries, hostels, specialized centres	University Websites; Institutional Reports	Infrastructure Index	Global University Rankings Study (2025)
	Digital Positioning	Availability of LMS; online admission systems; e-learning platforms; website sophistication	University Websites; ICT Disclosures	Digital Capability Index	Kolluru (2024); Pitelis et.al (2024)
Institutional Competitiveness	Ranking Visibility	Position/frequency in national/international ranking systems	Webometrics; uniRank; EduRank	Ranking Score	Global University Rankings Study (2025)
	Enrollment Attractiveness	Admission competitiveness; student demand indicators; application/admission strength	Admissions Portals; University Disclosures	Enrollment Proxy Index	Global University Rankings Study (2025)
	Programme Growth	Increase/diversification in academic programmes over time	NUC Records; Institutional Reports	Growth Rate / Count	Piatanom (2025);
	Institutional Prominence	Web/media visibility; recognizability; institutional brand prominence	Media Reports; Web Visibility Metrics	Prominence Index	Global University Rankings Study (2025)

3.4 Coding Framework / Secondary Data Extraction

To ensure consistency and objectivity in transforming institutional disclosures into measurable variables, a structured coding framework was developed to guide the extraction and scoring of secondary data across the selected institutions. The coding framework specifies the scoring criteria for each indicator and the corresponding scale used in constructing the composite indices for the study variables. Content validity was strengthened by mapping each indicator directly to the conceptual definitions and operational dimensions of the constructs and by triangulating evidence across official university sources, NUC records, ranking platforms, admission portals, and institutional disclosures. The coding rules were specified before assigning the 1-5 scores, thereby reducing discretionary scoring. Because the indices are constructed from distinct institutional attributes that collectively form the constructs, they are treated as formative composite indices rather than reflective multi-item scales. Consequently, internal-consistency statistics such as Cronbach's alpha are not used as the principal reliability criterion; formative index construction requires assessment of indicator relevance, content coverage, specification and weighting (Diamantopoulos & Winklhofer, 2001).

Table 3. Coding Framework / Secondary Data Extraction

Variable	Dimension	Indicator	Coding Criteria	Score
Strategic Positioning	Programme Differentiation	Number of Accredited Programmes	1-10 programmes = Very Low	1
			11-20 programmes = Low	2
			21-30 programmes = Moderate	3
			31-40 programmes = High	4
			Above 40 programmes = Very High	5
		Presence of Unique/Specialized Programmes	None = Very Low	1
			1 specialized programme = Low	2
			2-3 specialized programmes = Moderate	3
			4-5 specialized programmes = High	4
			Above 5 specialized programmes = Very High	5
	Brand Positioning	Ranking Presence	Not Ranked = Very Low	1
			Ranked in One Platform = Low	2
			Ranked in Two Platforms = Moderate	3
			Ranked in Three Platforms = High	4
			Ranked Nationally/Internationally Prominent = Very High	5
		Awards/Recognition	None = Very Low	1
			1-2 Recognitions = Low	2
			3-4 Recognitions = Moderate	3
			5-6 Recognitions = High	4
			Above 6 Recognitions = Very High	5

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Variable	Dimension	Indicator	Coding Criteria	Score
Institutional Competitiveness	Infrastructure Positioning	Physical Facilities Availability	Basic Facilities Only = Very Low	1
			Basic + Moderate Facilities = Low	2
			Good Facilities + Labs/Library = Moderate	3
			Extensive Modern Facilities = High	4
			World-Class/Highly Advanced Facilities = Very High	5
	Digital Positioning	LMS / E-Learning Platform	None = Very Low	1
			Basic Online Learning Support = Low	2
			Functional LMS Available = Moderate	3
			Advanced LMS + Student Portal = High	4
			Fully Integrated Digital Ecosystem = Very High	5
	Digital Positioning	Website Sophistication / Digital Services	Static Website Only = Very Low	1
			Basic Interactive Website = Low	2
			Functional Online Services = Moderate	3
			Advanced Online Systems = High	4
			Fully Digitized Institutional Services = Very High	5
	Ranking Visibility	Ranking Position/Visibility	Bottom Tier / Unranked = Very Low	1
			Low Visibility Ranking = Low	2
			Moderate Ranking Visibility = Moderate	3
			High Ranking Visibility = High	4
			Top Tier Visibility = Very High	5

Variable	Dimension	Indicator	Coding Criteria	Score
Enrollment Attractiveness		Admission Competitiveness / Demand	Very Low Demand = Very Low	1
			Low Demand = Low	2
			Moderate Demand = Moderate	3
			High Demand = High	4
			Very High Demand = Very High	5
Programme Growth		Growth in Programme Portfolio	No Growth = Very Low	1
			Minimal Growth = Low	2
			Moderate Growth = Moderate	3
			High Growth = High	4
			Extensive Growth = Very High	5
Institutional Prominence		Media/Web Visibility	Very Low = Very Low	1
			Low = Low	2
			Moderate = Moderate	3
			High = High	4
			Very High = Very High	5

Source: Developed by the researcher based on adapted indicators from extant literature and contextualized for secondary-data institutional analysis.

The researcher developed the coding framework for this study based on indicators synthesized from the extant higher education competitiveness and strategic management literature. Because no standardized secondary-data coding instrument exists for measuring strategic positioning and institutional competitiveness among private universities in the Nigerian context, the researcher operationalized the constructs into observable institutional indicators and developed context-appropriate scoring criteria for systematic data extraction. The composite indices were constructed by assigning equal weights to standardized indicators within each construct because no theoretical or empirical evidence justified differential weighting. Equal weighting was retained because the study has no defensible theoretical or empirical basis for assigning differential weights to the constituent institutional indicators. As a robustness measure, the regression model was also subjected to leave-one-predictor-out sensitivity checks. The overall model remained strong when each predictor was removed in turn (R^2 ranged from 0.887 to 0.933), indicating that the reported overall association is not attributable to one predictor alone. However, this sensitivity analysis does not substitute for independent inter-rater reliability. Because the present coding was performed through a single researcher-developed protocol, inter-rater agreement could not be statistically estimated; this is acknowledged as a limitation and future studies should employ two independent coders and report an appropriate agreement coefficient for a subset of the records.

Measurement Model Justification

The indicators adopted for this study are derived from extant higher education competitiveness and strategic management literature which operationalize institutional strategic positioning and competitiveness using publicly observable institutional attributes and market-based proxies where audited internal performance data are unavailable (Piatanom, 2025). The use of composite and index-based measures is appropriate given the multidimensional and institutional-level nature of the constructs under investigation.

3.5 Model Specification

To examine the effect of strategic positioning on institutional competitiveness among selected private universities in Southwest Nigeria, the study specifies the functional relationship as follows:

$$ICP=f(PD, BP, IP, DP)$$

$$IC=\beta_0+\beta_1PD+\beta_2BP+\beta_3IP+\beta_4DP+\varepsilon$$

Where:

- **IC** = Institutional Competitiveness
- **PD** = Programme Differentiation
- **BP** = Brand Positioning
- **IP** = Infrastructure Positioning
- **DP** = Digital Positioning
- **β_0** = Constant Term
- **$\beta_1 - \beta_4$** = Regression Coefficients of Independent Variables
- **ε** = Error Term

The model assumes that strategic positioning dimensions exert direct effects on institutional competitiveness.

3.6 Method of Data Analysis

The study employed descriptive statistics and multiple regression analysis to examine the effect of strategic positioning on institutional competitiveness. Multiple regression was considered appropriate for estimating direct relationships using composite secondary-data indices within the small census population. Multiple regression is used for this study because the research questions and hypotheses specify one outcome variable; institutional competitiveness, and four theoretically distinct explanatory dimensions: programme differentiation, brand positioning, infrastructure positioning, and digital positioning. The technique permits the simultaneous estimation of each predictor's unique statistical contribution while controlling for the other three predictors. This is preferable to bivariate analysis where the study's substantive objective is to assess the dimensions jointly. Given $N = 25$, however, the regression is treated as exploratory and the coefficient-level findings are interpreted cautiously. To strengthen inference in the small cross-sectional dataset, heteroskedasticity-consistent HC3 standard errors were used as a robustness check, following the small-sample considerations of MacKinnon and White (1985).

3.7 Decision Rules

The following criteria guided the interpretation of the regression results:

Coefficient of Determination (R^2): used to assess the explanatory power of the model

Adjusted R²: used to determine the proportion of variation in the dependent variable explained after adjusting for the number of predictors

F-statistic: used to assess the overall significance of the regression model

Beta coefficients (β): used to determine the direction and magnitude of the effect of each independent variable

t-statistic and p-value: used to test the significance of each independent variable

Decision Rule: Reject the null hypothesis if $p < 0.05$; otherwise, do not reject the null hypothesis

Variance Inflation Factor (VIF): used to test multicollinearity among predictors; values below 5.0 were considered acceptable.

A VIF value of 5.122 for infrastructure positioning represents a borderline multicollinearity concern rather than evidence that the predictor must automatically be deleted. The corresponding tolerance is approximately 0.195. Because infrastructure positioning was specified a priori as a theoretically distinct dimension of strategic positioning, it was retained in the primary model rather than removed solely because it marginally exceeded the conservative VIF=5 flag. However, the relatively high correlations among the strategic-positioning dimensions warrant an explicit sensitivity analysis. Accordingly, a reduced three-predictor specification excluding infrastructure positioning was estimated to determine whether the principal findings for programme differentiation, brand positioning and digital positioning were materially dependent on the borderline collinearity. In the reduced specification, all predictor VIFs fell below 5 (PD=2.535, BP=3.499, DP=1.935), while adjusted R² increased slightly from 0.921 to 0.923. Programme differentiation and brand positioning remained statistically significant, while digital positioning remained non-significant. Thus, the full model is retained as the theory-specified primary model, but the infrastructure coefficient is interpreted cautiously as a conditional association rather than as a definitive independent effect. The HC3 robustness check in the full model likewise produced the same substantive decision for infrastructure positioning ($p=.586$), further indicating that the borderline VIF does not reverse the inference. The reduced model is used as a diagnostic sensitivity specification and does not replace the original hypothesis structure.

4.0 DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 Data Presentation

This section presents the analysis of data collected from the twenty-five private universities included in the study. Institutional data were extracted from publicly available disclosures, official university websites, ranking platforms, and institutional records, then coded into composite indices representing the dimensions of strategic positioning and institutional competitiveness. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and multiple regression techniques to determine the effect of strategic positioning on institutional competitiveness among selected private universities in Southwest Nigeria.

Table 4. Secondary Data Extraction Matrix for Selected Private Universities

S/N	University	Programmes Score	Brand Score	Infrastructure Score	Digital Score	Competitiveness Score	Key Data Sources
1	Covenant University	5	5	5	5	5	Official Website; Webometrics; Scimago
2	Babcock University	5	5	5	4	5	Official Website; Webometrics

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S/N	University	Programmes Score	Brand Score	Infrastructure Score	Digital Score	Competitiveness Score	Key Data Sources
3	Afe Babalola University	5	5	5	4	5	Official Website; Rankings
4	Pan-Atlantic University	4	5	4	4	4	Official Website; Rankings
5	Bowen University	4	4	4	4	4	Official Website; Webometrics
6	Lead City University	4	4	4	4	4	Official Website; Admissions
7	Redeemer's University	4	4	4	4	4	Official Website; Webometrics
8	Bells University	4	4	4	4	4	Official Website
9	Ajayi Crowther University	4	3	4	3	3	Official Website
10	Caleb University	4	3	4	4	3	Official Website
11	Elizade University	3	3	4	4	3	Official Website
12	Achievers University	3	3	3	4	3	Official Website
13	Adeleke University	3	3	4	3	3	Official Website
14	Joseph Ayo Babalola University	4	3	4	3	3	Official Website
15	Fountain University	3	3	3	3	3	Official Website
16	McPherson University	3	3	3	3	3	Official Website
17	Mountain Top University	3	3	4	4	3	Official Website
18	Chrisland University	3	3	3	4	3	Official Website
19	Dominican University	2	3	3	4	2	Official Website
20	KolaDaisi University	2	3	3	3	2	Official Website
21	Crawford University	3	3	3	3	2	Official Website

S/N	University	Programmes Score	Brand Score	Infrastructure Score	Digital Score	Competitiveness Score	Key Data Sources
22	Southwestern University	2	2	3	3	2	Official Website
23	Augustine University	2	3	3	3	2	Official Website
24	Anchor University	2	3	3	3	2	Official Website
25	Oduduwa University	3	2	3	2	2	Official Website

4.2 Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics were computed to summarize the distributional characteristics of the study variables. The results indicate moderate to high variability across the selected private universities in the extent of strategic positioning and institutional competitiveness, suggesting substantial differences in strategic deployment and market competitiveness among the institutions.

Table 5. *Distribution of Private Universities in Southwest Nigeria Included in the Study*

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	Minimum	Maximum
Programme Differentiation	3.36	0.95	2.00	5.00
Brand Positioning	3.40	0.87	2.00	5.00
Infrastructure Positioning	3.68	0.69	3.00	5.00
Digital Positioning	3.56	0.65	2.00	5.00
Institutional Competitiveness	3.16	0.99	2.00	5.00

Table 5 presents the descriptive statistics of the study variables. The results indicate that the selected private universities exhibit moderate levels of strategic positioning and institutional competitiveness. Infrastructure positioning recorded the highest mean score (3.68), followed by digital positioning (3.56), while programme differentiation had the lowest mean score (3.36). Institutional competitiveness had a mean score of 3.16, suggesting moderate competitiveness across the institutions.

4.3 Correlation Analysis

Table 6 presents the Pearson correlation matrix for the study variables.

Table 6. Correlation Matrix

Variable	PD	BP	IP	DP	IC
Programme Differentiation (PD)	1.000				
Brand Positioning (BP)	0.778	1.000			
Infrastructure Positioning (IP)	0.880	0.780	1.000		
Digital Positioning (DP)	0.535	0.695	0.601	1.000	
Institutional Competitiveness (IC)	0.912	0.897	0.874	0.698	1.000

The correlation results show that all dimensions of strategic positioning are positively associated with institutional competitiveness. Programme differentiation recorded the strongest bivariate relationship with institutional competitiveness ($r = 0.912$), followed by brand positioning ($r = 0.897$), infrastructure positioning ($r = 0.874$), and digital positioning ($r = 0.698$). This suggests that improvements in strategic positioning are associated with stronger institutional competitiveness.

4.4 Regression Analysis

To determine the effect of strategic positioning on institutional competitiveness, multiple regression analysis was conducted.

Table 7. Model Summary

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error of Estimate
1	0.966	0.934	0.921	0.277

The model summary indicates that the dimensions of strategic positioning jointly explain 93.4% of the variation in institutional competitiveness. The adjusted R² of 0.921 shows that the explanatory power of the model remains very strong after adjusting for the number of predictors.

Table 8. ANOVA Result

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	22.335	4	5.584	70.720	0.000
Residual	1.579	20	0.079		
Total	23.914	24			

The ANOVA result shows that the regression model is statistically significant ($F = 70.720$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that the independent variables jointly have a significant effect on institutional competitiveness.

Table 9. Regression Coefficients

Variable	Unstandardized Beta	Std. Error	t-value	p-value	VIF
Constant	-1.109	0.379	-2.922	0.008	—
Programme Differentiation	0.504	0.133	3.787	0.001	4.989
Brand Positioning	0.406	0.125	3.258	0.004	3.627
Infrastructure Positioning	0.119	0.186	0.640	0.529	5.122
Digital Positioning	0.213	0.124	1.723	0.100	2.010

Small-sample robustness check using HC3 heteroskedasticity-consistent standard errors.

Variable	Coefficient	HC3 Std. Error	HC3 t-value	HC3 p-value
Programme Differentiation	0.504	0.145	3.467	0.002
Brand Positioning	0.406	0.157	2.591	0.017
Infrastructure Positioning	0.119	0.215	0.553	0.586
Digital Positioning	0.213	0.129	1.654	0.114

The HC3-adjusted results preserve the original substantive conclusions: programme differentiation and brand positioning remain statistically significant, whereas infrastructure positioning and digital positioning remain non-significant at the 5% level.

The results reveal that programme differentiation and brand positioning exert significant positive effects on institutional competitiveness. However, infrastructure positioning and digital positioning, although positively signed, do not achieve statistical significance in this preliminary regression model. The VIF values suggest moderate multicollinearity, with infrastructure positioning slightly above the common threshold of 5.

Multicollinearity Sensitivity Analysis. To assess whether the borderline VIF for infrastructure positioning materially affected the regression conclusions, a reduced specification excluding infrastructure positioning was estimated as a sensitivity check. The reduced model produced $R^2=0.933$ and adjusted $R^2=0.923$, compared with $R^2=0.934$ and adjusted $R^2=0.921$ in the full model. The VIF values for programme differentiation, brand positioning and digital positioning fell to 2.535, 3.499 and 1.935, respectively. Under HC3 standard errors, programme differentiation remained significant ($\beta=0.563$, $p<0.001$) and brand positioning remained significant ($\beta=0.421$, $p=0.006$), while digital positioning remained non-significant ($\beta=0.228$, $p=0.072$). The stability of the substantive conclusions for the other predictors indicates that the borderline collinearity is not driving the principal significant findings. Infrastructure positioning remains evaluated in the full theory-specified model and its coefficient is treated cautiously.

Predictor	Coefficient	HC3 Std. Error	HC3 p-value	VIF
Programme Differentiation	0.563	0.106	<0.001	2.535

Predictor	Coefficient	HC3 Std. Error	HC3 p-value	VIF
Brand Positioning	0.421	0.152	0.006	3.499
Digital Positioning	0.228	0.127	0.072	1.935

Note: Reduced sensitivity model excludes infrastructure positioning because its VIF in the full model was 5.122. The sensitivity specification is diagnostic and is not used to replace the theory-specified four-predictor model.

4.5 Hypotheses Testing

Based on the regression results, the hypotheses are decided as follows:

Hypothesis	Decision
H ₀₁ : Programme differentiation has no significant effect on institutional competitiveness	Rejected
H ₀₂ : Brand positioning has no significant effect on institutional competitiveness	Rejected
H ₀₃ : Infrastructure positioning has no significant effect on institutional competitiveness	Not Rejected
H ₀₄ : Digital positioning has no significant effect on institutional competitiveness	Not Rejected

4.6 Discussion of Findings

The findings reveal that strategic positioning significantly influences institutional competitiveness among the selected private universities in Southwest Nigeria, although the dimensions do not contribute equally. Programme differentiation positively and significantly enhances competitiveness, indicating that universities with broader and distinctive academic offerings are better positioned to attract and retain competitive attention. This finding aligns closely with Tyas and Ady (2024), who reported that differentiation strategy significantly improves competitive advantage at Dr. Soetomo University, and with Piatanom (2025), whose analysis linked programme diversification and curricular uniqueness with institutional attractiveness and strategic performance. The consistency across these studies suggests that distinctive academic offerings can serve as a visible market-positioning mechanism. The present study nevertheless extends the earlier evidence by examining programme differentiation jointly with brand, infrastructure and digital positioning using institution-level secondary indicators across multiple private universities.

Brand positioning also exerted a positive and statistically significant effect, reinforcing the importance of institutional image, reputation and visibility as intangible competitive resources. This result is broadly consistent with Falola et al. (2016), who found that branding and visibility-related strategies were associated with enrollment performance among Nigerian private universities. It also complements Duodu (2025), who found that strategic management practices positively influence performance among private university colleges in Ghana. The present result therefore supports the wider African evidence that deliberate strategic positioning and institutional visibility can strengthen competitive outcomes. However, the current study differs from Borishade et al. (2021), whose evidence centered on service quality, student satisfaction and loyalty; the present analysis shows that, at the institutional level, brand positioning remains significant even when other positioning dimensions are considered simultaneously.

The non-significant coefficients for infrastructure and digital positioning require a more qualified comparison with prior studies. Sun et al. (2025) found a positive effect of digital transformation on faculty performance, while Carmo et al. (2025) reported that digital transformation improved operational efficiency and institutional competitiveness across European universities. Gasmalla et al. (2025) likewise emphasized the contribution of digital optimization to university

visibility and performance metrics. The non-significant digital coefficient in the present study therefore departs from these studies, possibly because the current model evaluates digital positioning alongside programme and brand positioning and uses institution-level secondary indicators rather than faculty or management perceptions. In a similar way, the strong bivariate relationship between infrastructure positioning and competitiveness ($r=0.874$) but its non-significant conditional coefficient suggests that infrastructure may function as a shared institutional capability rather than a unique differentiator once other positioning dimensions are controlled. The relatively strong correlations among predictors support this interpretation and also explain why the infrastructure coefficient should not be read as evidence that infrastructure is unimportant. Rather, within this small census, its unique contribution is difficult to distinguish statistically from overlapping positioning resources.

5.0 Conclusion

This study examined the effect of strategic positioning on institutional competitiveness among selected private universities in Southwest Nigeria using a secondary-data census design and multiple regression analysis. The findings showed that strategic positioning significantly influences institutional competitiveness, explaining a substantial share of competitiveness variation among the institutions. Specifically, programme differentiation and brand positioning had positive and statistically significant effects on competitiveness, while infrastructure and digital positioning, though positive, were not significant. The study concludes that programme differentiation and brand positioning are the most influential strategic drivers of competitiveness among private universities in Southwest Nigeria.

5.1 Recommendations

The study recommends that Private universities should prioritize programme diversification and curricular differentiation by expanding distinctive, market-responsive academic offerings to enhance competitiveness. Management should also strengthen branding and reputation through strategic communication, stakeholder engagement, and ranking participation. Although infrastructure and digital capabilities were not statistically significant predictors, institutions should continue improving these areas as supportive assets that enhance institutional quality and attractiveness.

5.2 Contribution to knowledge

This study contributes to strategic management literature by extending the application of Positioning Theory to the higher education sector within an emerging economy context. It advances scholarship on university competitiveness by conceptualizing institutional competitiveness through a strategic management lens rather than the dominant educational management and consumer-behaviour perspectives. Methodologically, the study contributes by operationalizing institutional competitiveness using secondary-data and composite institutional indicators, thereby offering an alternative measurement approach for contexts characterized by limited access to internal institutional performance data.

5.3 Limitations and Suggestions for Future Studies

The study is limited by its reliance on secondary-data proxies, which may not fully capture the internal strategic and qualitative dimensions of institutional competitiveness. Additionally, its focus on private universities in Southwest Nigeria may constrain broader generalizability. Future research may adopt longitudinal or mixed-method approaches to validate the findings and extend the model across broader educational and institutional contexts.

The study has additional methodological limitations. First, the census contains only 25 institutions, which restricts statistical power and makes the regression estimates sensitive to the inclusion or exclusion of individual universities. The results should therefore be regarded as exploratory evidence within the defined population rather than as broadly generalizable causal estimates. Second, the composite indices are based on publicly observable proxies and researcher-developed coding rules; they may not capture confidential strategic investments, student perceptions, internal quality measures, or financial performance. Third, the absence of independent double-coding limits the ability to estimate inter-

ration agreement statistically. Fourth, the cross-sectional design prevents examination of changes in strategic positioning and competitiveness over time. Fifth, the borderline multicollinearity between some strategic-positioning dimensions means that individual coefficients should be interpreted as conditional associations rather than isolated measures of strategic importance. Future research should expand the institutional coverage, use longitudinal/panel observations where consistent historical data are available, employ independent coders, and incorporate perceptual and audited institutional performance measures. A reduced three-predictor sensitivity specification excluding infrastructure positioning reduced all VIFs below 5 and preserved the substantive conclusions for the remaining predictors; nevertheless, infrastructure positioning remains a cautiously interpreted component of the primary theory-specified model.

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