

ARTICLE

Challenges of Christian Missionary Education in Igboland, Nigeria: A Case of the Catholic Secondary Schools Educational Project (1885–1970)

Peter Ugwumba Iwunna , Paulinus Paul Nwankwor * , Felicia Nnnena Opara 

Department of Educational Foundations, University of Nigeria Nsukka, Nsukka 410001, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the major challenges faced by the Catholic Mission's secondary schools educational project in Igboland, Southeast Nigeria, between 1885 and 1970. Using a historical-documentary research method, the study draws on archival materials, missionary records, colonial policy documents, and secondary literature to reconstruct and analyse the obstacles that impeded Catholic secondary school education in the region. The analysis demonstrates that financial constraints, poor infrastructure, inadequate teacher training, frequent student absenteeism, cultural resistance, transportation difficulties, language barriers, inadequate school supervision, local community resistance, and the devastating consequences of the Nigeria-Biafra civil war collectively undermined the mission's educational enterprise. 1885 marked the first arrival of the Catholic Mission at Onitsha, while 1970 marked both the end of the bitter civil war and the government takeover of all mission schools under the East Central State administration. This paper argues that, despite these formidable obstacles, the Catholic Church's educational influence in Igboland continued to grow, and its secondary schools project laid important foundations for literacy, professional development, and community empowerment in the region. The findings hold broader relevance for contemporary debates on faith-based education, state-church relations in schooling, educational governance, and post-conflict educational reconstruction in Africa and other post-colonial contexts.

Keywords: Catholic Missionary Education; Catholic Secondary Schools; Challenges; Educational Project; Colonial Nigeria; Igboland

*CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:

Paulinus Paul Nwankwor, Department of Educational Foundations, University of Nigeria Nsukka, Nsukka 410001, Nigeria;
Email: paulinus.nwankwor@unn.edu.ng

ARTICLE INFO

Received: 17 November 2025 | Revised: 8 April 2026 | Accepted: 29 April 2026 | Published Online: 28 June 2026
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30564/jiep.v9i1.12779>

CITATION

Iwunna, P.U., Nwankwor, P.P., Opara, F.N., 2026. Challenges of Christian Missionary Education in Igboland, Nigeria: A Case of the Catholic Secondary Schools Educational Project (1885–1970). *Journal of International Education and Practice*. 9(1): 95–104.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30564/jiep.v9i1.12779>

COPYRIGHT

Copyright © 2026 by the author(s). Published by Bilingual Publishing Group. This is an open access article under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0) License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>).

1. Introduction

Catholic missionary education in Igboland encountered numerous challenges in its efforts to deliver literacy to the young men and women of the region. Between 1885, when the mission made its first entry into the area, and 1970, when the government assumed control of all mission and voluntary agency schools in the former East Central State, the missionary project of providing secondary school education faced severe bottlenecks. These difficulties almost crippled the project and denied the mission the opportunity of making a more decisive contribution to the educational development of Igboland.

Among the Igbo, 1970 is associated with the post-civil war era. That year marked the official end of the brutal civil war between the Igbo and the rest of Nigeria, leaving almost all schools and educational establishments within the area in states of serious destruction and devastation following thirty months of bombardment^[1,2].

From the earliest days, all efforts by the Catholic missionaries to pursue their educational project without encountering serious difficulties proved futile. Attempts to secure a stable foundation for this work were consistently hampered, with the result that some of the mission's educational objectives became unattainable. Consequently, the mission's secondary schools project suffered challenges that adversely affected success rates among students. Largely unprepared for the scale of these difficulties, the mission found that literacy impartation experienced serious setbacks after the primary school project was introduced in Igboland following the arrival of the Catholic missionaries at Onitsha on 5th December 1885^[3-5].

Despite the weight of these challenges, the missionaries continued to press forward with their project of introducing the Igbo to the arts of literacy through the establishment of schools in towns and villages. Efforts to convert the population to the Christian faith were pursued with equal vigour. The missionaries believed that equipping young men and women with both primary and secondary education would reshape their attitudes, alter their beliefs and thinking patterns, and arm them with professional skills.

This paper examines some of the key challenges that impeded the realisation of the Catholic Mission's efforts to provide effective secondary school education to the Igbo. The analysis is structured in two main parts. The first presents

a historical survey of the arrival of the Catholic Mission in Igboland, alongside other Christian missions, and identifies the factors that drew these missions into the provision of formal schooling. The second focuses on the numerous problems that hampered the growth of this Christian missionary educational enterprise in Igboland.

The period 1885 to 1970 is highly significant in the history of missionary education in Igboland. It represents an era when secondary school education was still at an early stage of development. The year 1885 marked the first arrival of the Catholic Mission at Onitsha, in present-day Anambra State. Before that year, there were no secondary schools anywhere in Igboland. Post-primary institutions began to emerge only after the first cohort of pupils completed their primary education and missionaries decided to establish higher levels of schooling. The intention was to arm learners with the middle-level manpower skills required by the Nigerian nation at that stage, and to train the local workforce needed for the functioning of the numerous expatriate establishments located across Igboland and beyond. Regrettably, the year 1970 also marked the end of the bitter civil war and the government takeover of all mission schools, a development that led to improved working conditions for teachers throughout the region^[6].

2. Research Methodology

This study adopts a historical-documentary research method. Primary sources consulted include archival materials held at the National Archives Enugu, colonial policy documents such as the 1925 Memorandum on Education in British Tropical Africa, and original mission records. These are complemented by a wide range of secondary literature, including published histories of missionary education in Nigeria, scholarly analyses of colonial educational policy, and the extensive body of work produced by researchers on Igbo Christianity and Catholic missionary activity. The sources were selected for their relevance to the period under study and were analysed thematically to identify and categorise the principal challenges encountered by the Catholic Mission's secondary schools project in Igboland between 1885 and 1970.

3. Historical Survey

Onitsha, located in present-day Anambra State, played several critical roles in the history of Igbo Catholicism and

the subsequent introduction of Christian missionary education in Igboland. The foremost Catholic missionaries, along with other Christian mission counterparts, navigated into other Igbo towns and villages from this strategic base. Onitsha's location on the shores of the River Niger facilitated this historic encounter. The ready access it provided to other Igbo towns and villages enabled the rapid spread of various Christian missions into distant communities.

Onitsha served as a key commercial base for European firms operating in Southeast Nigeria during the period^[5,7]. The foremost European missionaries to enter Igboland were the French Catholic missionaries, led by Rev. Fr. Lutz, who arrived at Onitsha on 5th December 1885. Prior to this development, the Royal Niger Company, a British commercial firm engaged in the import and export of raw materials, had been licensed by the British government to handle all commercial and administrative activities within the Niger areas. The company held a monopoly over trade and commerce in the area, and also administered the territory on behalf of Britain^[3,8].

Today, Onitsha continues to pride itself as the heartland of Igbo Catholicism and is informally known as the 'Ireland of Nigeria,' an appellation widely used among the Igbo to recognise the enormous role played by the town and its people in hosting the first Christian missionaries from Europe^[3,7]. As the missionaries travelled across the Igbo landscape, they recorded their presence through the establishment of schools, churches, and literacy centres. The first educated indigenes of Onitsha served as teachers, catechists, letter writers, interpreters, and messengers, whose activities contributed to the spread of Christian missionary education across Igboland^[3,7,9].

Supported by this small pool of educated local personnel, the CMS and the Catholic Mission were able to penetrate different towns and villages with relative ease. Within a short period, towns such as Atani, Aguleri, Nt- edje, Obosi, Awka, Nnewi, Owerri, Mbaise, Nkwere, Aba, Bende, Arochukwu, Ogidi, Nsugbe, and Ogbunike converted to Christianity^[4,10,11]. For instance, Fr. John Cross Anyaogu, ordained on 8th December 1930, and Fr. Michael Iwene Tansi, ordained on 19th December 1937, were both indigenes of Onitsha. Their contributions to the educational and evangelisational development of Igboland are still celebrated

by the Igbo^[7,12,13].

The Catholic Mission was a relatively latecomer in the missionary engagement with Igboland. Before its arrival, a CMS team led by Bishop Ajayi Crowther, a former slave of Yoruba birth, had entered Onitsha in July 1857. Armed with the advantage of earlier entry, the CMS established schools and missionary outposts within and around the Onitsha area, including Asaba, Alonso, Abo, Obosi, and Awka. The CMS also enjoyed the privilege of occupying choice parcels of land around Onitsha and its environs. These factors set the stage for the missionary rivalry that later developed in parts of Igboland^[4,11,13,14].

The Presbyterian Mission, led by Rev. Hope Masterton Waddell, had entered Igboland from the Calabar area in April 1846. Having received a piece of land from King Eyamba of Duke Town, Calabar, the mission erected the Hope Waddell Training Institute, the foremost technical training school in the Calabar area at that time. From its Calabar headquarters, its educational and missionary activities spread to neighbouring Igbo towns such as Afikpo, Ngwa, Aba, and Arochukwu^[15].

Several other Christian missions also contributed to the Igbo educational enterprise. These included the Primitive Methodist Mission, which arrived at Uzuakoli in 1910; the Qua Iboe Mission, which arrived in 1887; the Adventist Mission; the Sudan United Mission; the Sudan Interior Mission; and the Apostolic Church of Christ. Their activities accelerated the spread of schools and mission outposts across Igboland^[16,17].

Following the death of Monsignor Leon Lejeune in 1905 and his replacement by Monsignor Joseph Shanahan, the Catholic Mission's policy of evangelisation through education gained considerable momentum. The establishment of schools and educational institutions across Igboland became a central mission priority. Catholic primary and secondary schools, teacher training colleges, seminaries, technical colleges, and domestic science centres began to emerge in towns and villages throughout the region^[3,5,7]. **Table 1** below shows the major post-primary schools established by the catholic mission in Igboland while **Table 2** shows the major healthcare establishments erected by the catholic mission in Igboland.

Table 1. Major Post-Primary Schools Established by the Catholic Mission in Igboland.

No.	Name of School/Institution	Year Established	Current Location
1	College of the Immaculate Conception (CIC)	1940	Enugu
2	Queen of the Holy Rosary College (QRC)	1942	Enugu State
3	St. Patrick's College, Emene	1956	Enugu State
4	Our Lady of Lourdes	1936	Anambra State
5	Our Lady's College, Nnobi	1959	Anambra State
6	Community Grammar School, Amuzi	1962	Imo State
7	All Hallows Seminary, Onitsha	1952	Anambra State
8	St. Peter Claver's Seminary, Okpala Aba	1951	Imo State
9	Bigard Memorial Seminary, Enugu	1950	Enugu State
10	Congregation of the Handmaids of the Holy Child Jesus, Awka	1931	Anambra State
11	Immaculate Heart of Mary, Ihiala	1937	Anambra State
12	Loreto Training College, Adazi	1939	Anambra State
13	Holy Rosary College, Enugu	1943	Enugu State
14	Mount Carmel College, Emekuku	1943	Imo State
15	St. Martin's Training College, Ihiala	N/A	Anambra State
16	Bishop Shanahan Training College, Orlu	1948	Imo State
17	Holy Ghost Training College, Umuahia	1948	Abia State
18	Teacher Training College, Agulu	1949	Anambra State
19	Teacher Training College, Nsukka	1951	Enugu State
20	Teacher Training College, Iwollo	1959	Enugu State
21	St. Patrick's Training College, Ogbé Ahiara	1956	Imo State
22	St. Joseph's Training College, Aba	1949	Abia State
23	Women's Training College, Ogbor Nguru, Mbaise	1948	Imo State
24	Igbariam Teacher Training College	1913	Anambra State
25	St. Charles' Teacher Training College, Onitsha	1928	Anambra State
26	St. Mary's Teacher Training College, Azaraegbelu, Owerri	1949	Imo State
27	St. Theresa's Teacher Training College, Nsukka	1949	Enugu State
28	St. Anthony's Teacher Training College, Agulu	1949	Anambra State
29	Teacher Training College, Orlu	1947	Imo State
30	Catholic Elementary Training Centre, Okpalla, Owerri	1937	Imo State

Source: Authors' compilation from various mission records and secondary sources.

Table 2. Major Healthcare Establishments Erected by the Catholic Mission in Igboland.

No.	Name of Health Care Facility	Year Established	Current Location
1	Holy Rosary Maternity, Onitsha	1935	Anambra State
2	Mount Carmel Hospital, Emekuku	1935	Imo State
3	St. Joseph's Hospital, Adazi	1939	Anambra State
4	Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Ihiala	1936	Anambra State
5	Mother of Christ Maternity Hospital, Enugu	1958	Enugu State
6	Borromeo Hospital, Onitsha	1937	Anambra State

4. The Major Challenges

The following challenges largely impeded the Catholic Church's secondary school project in Igboland. Each is treated under a separate subheading.

4.1. Financial Difficulties

Finance was a critical factor in the realisation of the Catholic educational project in Igboland. The persistent scarcity of funds remained a severe constraint for the mission across many towns and villages. Owing to inadequate funding, the mission's capacity to extend its educational activities to all Igbo communities suffered serious setbacks. Other Christian missions experienced the same predicament.

As a result, the Catholic Mission's ability to deliver quality education was impaired. Teachers' salaries could not be paid adequately or commensurately. Instead, monthly stipends that were insufficient to sustain teachers' families were disbursed to staff employed in mission schools. The provision of relevant teaching and learning materials was also inadequate. Educational infrastructure was insufficient to accommodate the growing numbers of students seeking enrolment. Consequently, educational activities were conducted in unsuitable environments, adversely affecting the quality of education received^[18–21].

In addition, the majority of Catholic Mission secondary schools operated without adequate supervision by trained school inspectors. This meant that there were insufficient

qualified personnel available for deployment to schools. Teachers' activities and classroom performance consequently remained largely unmonitored and unevaluated^[5,7].

The mission's sources of funding were meagre. Revenue typically came from the British government's annual grants-in-aid of education, financial contributions from host communities, support from the mother church in Rome, and tuition fees paid by students. The British government considered the education of local populations to be outside its fiscal responsibilities, preferring instead to offer the Christian missions bare minimum support through grants-in-aid. From the British perspective, education was the responsibility of the missions and not a government obligation. Evidence of this imperial policy is visible in the near-total absence of government-owned schools in Igboland during this period. With only minimal government support, the Catholic Mission and other Christian missions managed to establish secondary schools across Igboland^[2,5,18,22–24].

It could therefore be argued that the missionaries were largely unprepared for the scale of the educational project in which they found themselves engaged. Their involvement in formal schooling was driven in part by the need to build the foundations required for successful evangelisation of Igboland, and in part by the need to recruit and train adequate numbers of local personnel for the tasks ahead. In this light, the Catholic missionaries viewed investment in secondary schooling as an opportunity to equip learners with essential skills, arm them with the literacy needed for personal development, and prepare them for the broader demands of the mission's community development work.

4.2. Frequent Absenteeism from School

Among students, frequent absence from school constituted another major challenge for the Catholic Mission's secondary schools project in Igboland. This problem was particularly pronounced because a large proportion of parents did not appreciate the value of education in the lives of their children. Many parents were illiterate and could not see the connection between regular school attendance and the educational empowerment of young persons^[5,7].

For such parents, encouraging their wards to make regular school attendance a priority was considered irrelevant. They derived satisfaction in keeping young boys and girls away from school to engage them in domestic chores. Among

the Igbo, it was common for children and young people to be withdrawn from school on certain market days to assist their parents on the farm or at market stalls. Some were assigned specific domestic tasks that consumed the entire school day. These patterns made devastating impacts on the overall performance of affected students^[5,25].

4.3. Poor Quality of Educational Infrastructure

A great many mission secondary schools in Igboland were mere shells of what they ought to have been. Several operated without adequate teaching and learning facilities capable of supporting effective education at the secondary level. In the absence of proper facilities, some mission schools operated in improvised structures including local church halls and community meeting halls, which offered little that was conducive to secondary school education^[7].

In many communities, schools operated within dilapidated mud-walled buildings with rough floors and leaking roofs. Some communities lacked any permanent structures whatsoever. Proper ventilation, sanitation facilities, and recreational amenities were largely unavailable. Some secondary schools also operated with insufficient desks, chairs, tables, exercise books, textbooks, pens, pencils, chalkboards, science laboratories, and workshops. These conditions adversely affected students' overall performance^[5,26–28].

4.4. Inadequate Training for Teachers

Challenges also arose in the area of teacher education within the Catholic Mission's secondary schools in Igboland. The majority of employed teachers were either untrained or had not received adequate formal teacher education to prepare them for professional work in secondary schools. This professional unpreparedness naturally affected their ability to handle their subjects effectively. Their lack of training impaired their capacity to understand lesson content fully and deliver it competently in the classroom^[5,6,29].

The Catholic Mission classified such teachers as 'uncertificated' and usually posted them to remote villages that fell outside the radius of government school inspectors. This class of teacher was poorly remunerated but heavily overworked. The dire shortage of trained teachers compelled this kind of improvisation. Some training colleges themselves lacked the necessary teaching and learning materials

for proper teacher education. Many operated without approved textbooks, and basic facilities for effective classroom instruction were in short supply. These shortcomings were attributable in large part to the scarcity of funds in the hands of the missionaries, a condition worsened by the British government's failure to fund schools adequately in the colonised territories^[4,6,14,30].

4.5. Poor Supervision of Schools

Inadequate school supervision was another major area of difficulty for Catholic missionary education in Igboland. The missionaries did not have sufficient numbers of trained and qualified school supervisors. In some parts of Igboland, untrained and unqualified teachers who lacked the prerequisite background were hastily appointed as school inspectors without the basic experience required for such roles. As a result, several mission-appointed inspectors did not possess the professional qualifications needed to perform the job effectively^[18].

Given their lack of professional training, these individuals struggled to supervise large numbers of teachers and pupils to any meaningful standard. Their capacity to manage financial records, handle administrative matters in schools, and attend to staff welfare professionally was limited. Their ability to interpret British colonial education policy and apply it appropriately to local settings was also lacking^[5,23,28].

Under such conditions, some mission secondary schools continued to teach curricular content that was poorly matched to local needs. Teachers in these schools handled their subjects inadequately, which adversely affected student performance and interest. Additionally, many subjects taught in mission schools relied on Europe-based educational curricula that focused on imperial history, values, cultures, and social activities, rather than Nigerian landmarks, heroes, and heritage. As a result, mission school graduates were often poorly educated, less creative, intellectually constrained, and professionally underprepared. Scholars have described this cohort of secondary school leavers as products of educational consumerism^[5,7,31].

Records confirm that poor supervision in Catholic Mission schools in Igboland was attributable to the inadequate number of trained and certificated supervisors available within the colonial territory. The activities of some schools were consequently left unmonitored for extended periods.

Many teachers recruited into mission schools had no prior teacher training. Teaching and learning in classrooms frequently amounted to a one-way transmission of knowledge, with learners remaining passive consumers of imperial culture^[23,32].

4.6. Influence of Cultures and Traditions

The Igbo attachment to local cultures and traditional values clearly affected the spread of missionary education in Igboland. Igbo society is a patriarchal and male-dominated society in which males play preeminent roles in families and communities. Major decisions on community matters are taken by men. On the basis of this social structure, Western education as provided by Christian missionaries was resisted and rejected by many Igbo parents. They perceived the white man's model of education as a direct negation of indigenous Igbo values and traditions. They regarded it as a deliberate attempt to deny them their identity, destroy their value systems, and expose learners to alien imperial cultures^[6,14].

Igbo parents' scepticism about British colonial education was further intensified by their fear of its negative effects on their children. These effects included the rejection of indigenous modes of dress, ancestral religious worship, local belief systems, food culture, and social relationships. Such developments led many Igbo parents to conclude that exposure to imperial education represented an abuse of revered indigenous values, a source of social decadence, an agent of moral corruption, a training ground for sexual promiscuity, a tool for community disintegration, and a rejection of valued family norms. On these grounds, many Igbo families refused to allow their children to participate in missionary education^[5,6,14].

4.7. The Nigeria-Biafra Civil War

Catholic missionary education in Igboland suffered severe disruption during the Nigeria-Biafra civil war. The conflict caused devastating destruction of lives and property, demolished schools and educational infrastructure, cut short the lives of young men and women, disrupted the academic calendar, and destroyed the economic foundations of communities in Southeast Nigeria, predominantly inhabited by the Igbo. The civil war began in 1967 and continued until January 1970, when it ended during the military regime of

General Gowon^[1].

The outbreak of the civil war left missionary schools in a state of acute devastation. The military campaign of the Nigerian government destroyed business ventures, demolished schools, killed large numbers of school-age children, and forced teachers and students to the war front. Hospitals and other medical facilities were also targeted. Teachers were forcibly drafted into the army, while schools and educational facilities were converted into military training grounds. These developments severely undermined the educational advancement of the Igbo and led to the destruction of Christian mission secondary schools^[5,7,33].

When the civil war ended in January 1970, the task of rebuilding damaged schools proved enormously difficult. In an effort to reunite the country and heal the wounds of the conflict, the government promulgated a decree transferring ownership and management of all schools from the Christian missions and other voluntary agencies to government control throughout Igboland. With this policy in place, the missionaries who had run the schools departed. The era of school indiscipline and moral decline followed, as teachers and parents lost the level of influence over students that mission school governance had provided^[5,6,9].

4.8. Problems of Transportation

Transportation was another crucial area of difficulty for Christian mission schools in Igboland. Movement from one community to the next proved extremely difficult for many missionaries, particularly because a number of Catholic missionaries had neither motorcycles nor cars. The majority travelled by bicycle and small boats when visiting riverine areas. This made it arduous to reach the communities where their schools were located. The transportation of goods and services, educational materials, and household items also suffered serious delays. Maintaining contact with colleagues in other towns and villages became a real challenge^[4,5,7,11].

For instance, the journey from Onitsha to Owerri, which by car should have taken only a few hours, often required several days to complete. Movement from Onitsha to Aba, Okigwe, Mbaise, and Umuahia was even more difficult, frequently requiring missionaries to trek along dangerous bush paths and unpaved roads for days on end. This led to the loss of significant working hours and delayed the delivery of crucial educational materials. Conditions improved con-

siderably after the British firm UAC was licensed to begin importing motor vehicles into Igboland^[4,7].

4.9. Local Resistance

Local resistance to missionary educational activities created another severe obstacle in Igboland. This resistance typically manifested as inter-community conflicts, refusal to enrol children in schools, withdrawal of children and wards from schools, deliberate hostility toward white missionaries, local protest marches, refusal to pay local levies in support of missionary education, inter-denominational conflicts among Christian missions, and refusal to donate family land for mission school projects. In some communities, parents refused to pay their children's tuition fees as a way of forcing their withdrawal from school^[4,5,7,34–36].

4.10. Language Obstacles

Christian missionaries also encountered complex language challenges. The expatriate missionaries had no knowledge of the prevailing Igbo language, the indigenous medium of communication among the population. They neither wrote nor spoke Igbo, which was essential for effective evangelisation and educational activity. They were therefore compelled to rely on local Igbo personnel for interpretation and translation services^[37].

The country now known as Nigeria was formally ceded to British colonial administration at the conclusion of the Berlin Conference of 1884 to 1885. That conference was attended by fourteen European nations and the United States of America. At its conclusion, Nigeria was placed under British authority. This was followed by the imposition of the English language as the official medium of communication, including in education^[38,39].

With English imposed as the official language of education, missionary educational curricula reflected European content strongly shaped by imperial values. Pupils were taught about the Queen of England, the seasons of Europe, major European wars, European heroes, and British monarchs. The same curricula deliberately ignored Nigerian landmarks, heroes, traditional rulers, and historic communities^[5].

Following the publication of the 1925 Memorandum on Education, which served as Nigeria's first educational policy document, the British government made a deliberate effort

to give the local language official recognition while consolidating the role of English in formal education. In line with this policy, the Igbo language was designated as the medium of instruction for children at the primary level, while English remained prominent at the secondary school level^[40].

4.11. Health Challenges

The health challenges faced by European missionaries during their years of service in Igboland were severe and debilitating. Malaria fever, typhoid, dysentery, hepatitis, and dengue fever posed constant threats that weighed heavily on the lives of the expatriates, negatively affecting their capacity to meet the demands of their educational projects. Persistent exposure to mosquito bites in a foreign land left many missionaries unable to resist the effects of recurring illness. Unhealthy environmental conditions, poor housing, difficult terrain, attacks by dangerous animals, and inadequate food supplies compounded their health situations and frequently led to death^[5,23,41].

These health-related complications inevitably impacted the mission's schools project in Igboland. However, with the growth of the Catholic Mission's investments in community development, most notably its establishment of clinics, hospitals, and maternity homes in local communities, the necessary platforms were created to address some of these healthcare challenges over time.

5. Conclusion

The Catholic Mission's engagement in secondary school education in Igboland was a positive, dynamic, and forward-looking investment. This educational enterprise helped to create the necessary conditions for imparting valuable skills to young school graduates and provided the intellectual tools that prepared them for entry into higher educational institutions. By providing this level of education, the mission created opportunities for youth empowerment, wealth creation, job generation, the reduction of indolence and unemployment, a decrease in crime and criminality, and meaningful contribution to community development.

Against this background, it is evident that Christian missionary education in Igboland made substantial contributions to the development of the region, equipping its people with the economic and professional tools needed to support

themselves and others. These contributions remain visible in present-day Nigeria.

The challenges documented in this study also hold wider relevance. The difficulties encountered by the Catholic Mission in financing schools, training teachers, supervising educational activities, and managing state-church relations resonate with ongoing debates in contemporary education scholarship. Scholars working on faith-based education, state involvement in schooling, and post-conflict educational reconstruction in Africa and other post-colonial contexts will find useful historical precedents in the Igboland experience. The eventual government takeover of mission schools in 1970 also offers a case study in the transition from voluntary agency to state-administered education, with implications for understanding issues of educational governance, institutional identity, and the consequences of conflict for educational systems.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, P.U.I. and P.P.N.; methodology, P.U.I.; software, P.U.I.; validation, P.U.I., P.P.N. and F.N.O.; formal analysis, P.U.I.; investigation, P.U.I.; resources, P.U.I. and P.P.N.; data curation, P.U.I.; writing—original draft preparation, P.U.I.; writing—review and editing, P.P.N. and F.N.O.; visualization, P.U.I.; supervision, P.P.N.; project administration, P.P.N.; funding acquisition, P.P.N. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding

This work received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement

This study is a historical-documentary research that relies entirely on archival materials, published secondary sources, and colonial policy documents. No human participants were involved in data collection. Ethical approval from an Institutional Review Board (IRB) was therefore not required for this study.

Informed Consent Statement

Not applicable. This study did not involve any human participants, and no personal data were collected. All sources

consulted are archival documents and published scholarly works that are publicly accessible.

Data Availability Statement

The data supporting the findings of this study are drawn from archival materials held at the National Archives Enugu, Nigeria, and from published secondary literature cited in the reference list. These archival sources are available to researchers upon application to the National Archives Enugu. Published sources are accessible through standard academic libraries and repositories.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest. The research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

AI Use Statement

During the preparation of this work, the authors used Claude AI for grammar checking. The authors subsequently reviewed and edited the content as necessary and take full responsibility for the final content of the published article.

References

- [1] Madiebo, A.A., 1980. *The Nigerian Revolution and the Biafran War*. Fourth Dimension Publishers Co. Ltd.: Enugu, Nigeria.
- [2] Okwuosa, L., Nwaoga, C.T., Uroko, F., 2021. The Post-War Era in Nigeria and the Resilience of Igbo Communal System. *Jambá: Journal of Disaster Risk Studies*. 13(1), a867. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4102/jamba.v13i1.867>
- [3] Omenka, N.I., 1989. *The School in the Service of Evangelization: The Catholic Educational Impact in Eastern Nigeria 1886–1950*. E.J. Brill: Leiden, The Netherlands.
- [4] Iwunna, P., 2009. *The Impact of the Christian Missionary Education on the Educational Development of Nigeria: A Case Study of the Primary School Educational Activities of the Catholic Mission in Igboland (1925–1970)* [PhD Thesis]. Katholieke Universiteit Leuven: Leuven, Belgium.
- [5] Iwunna, P.U., Chima, N.E., Dioka, B.O., et al., 2021. Challenges of Christian Missionary Education in Igboland, Nigeria: Focus on the Impediments Affecting the Catholic Primary School Projects (1885–1970). *Journal of Education and Practice*. 12(29), 71–80.
- [6] Fafunwa, A.B., 1974. *History of Education in Nigeria*. George Allen and Unwin: London, UK.
- [7] Iwunna, P., 2011. *The impact of Catholic primary school education in Igboland: The impact of the catholic education*. Lambert Academic Publishing: Saarbrücken, Germany.
- [8] Jedwab, R., Meier zu Selhausen, F., Moradi, A., 2022. The Economics of Missionary Expansion: Evidence from Africa and Implications for Development. *Journal of Economic Growth*. 27(2), 149–192. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10887-022-09202-8>
- [9] Arinze, F.A., 1982. *The Impact of Christian Education at Present*. Archdiocesan Secretariat: Onitsha, Nigeria.
- [10] Kalu, O.U., 2003. *The Embattled Gods: Christianization of Igboland, 1841–1991*. African World Press: Trenton, NJ, USA.
- [11] Ekechi, F.K., 1996. *Missionary Enterprise and Rivalry in Igboland 1857–1991*. Minaj Publishers: Lagos, Nigeria.
- [12] Ekechi, F.K., 1972. *Missionary Enterprise and Rivalry in Igboland, 1857–1914*, 1st ed. Frank Cass: London, UK.
- [13] Nwosu, V.A., 1982. The Growth of the Catholic Church in Onitsha Ecclesiastical Province. In: Makozi, A.O., Ojo, G.J.A. (eds.). *The History of the Catholic Church in Nigeria*. Macmillan Nigeria Publishers Limited: Lagos, Nigeria. pp. 38–54.
- [14] Omolewa, M., 1986. *Certificate History of Nigeria*. Longman Nigeria Limited: Ikeja, Nigeria.
- [15] Ezegwu, C., Cin, F.M., 2022. Postcolonial Masculinity and Access to Basic Education in Nigeria. *International Journal of Educational Research*. 115, 102052. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2022.102052>
- [16] Henn, S.J., Larreguy, H., Schmidt-Padilla, C., 2025. Missionary Activity, Education, and Long-Run Political Development: Evidence Across Regime Types in Africa. *Comparative Political Studies*. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/00104140251369335>
- [17] Becker, B., 2022. The Empire Within: Longitudinal Evidence on the Expansion of Christian Missions in Colonial Africa. *Journal of Historical Political Economy*. 2(2), 333–362. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1561/115.00000032>
- [18] Phillipson, S., 1948. *Grants in Aid of Education in Nigeria: A Review, with Recommendations*. Government Printer: Lagos, Nigeria.
- [19] Becker, B., Schmitt, C., 2023. License to Educate: The Role of National Networks in Colonial Empires. *World Development*. 169, 106286. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2023.106286>
- [20] Ezegwu, C., Okoye, D., 2024. Political Bargaining, Religion, and Educational Development: The Nigerian

- Experience from the Takeover of Schools from Christian Missions. *International Journal of Educational Development*. 106, 103000. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2024.103000>
- [21] Okoye, D., 2021. Things Fall Apart? Missions, Institutions, and Interpersonal Trust. *Journal of Development Economics*. 148, 102568. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdeveco.2020.102568>
- [22] Ricart-Huguet, J., 2021. Colonial Education, Political Elites, and Regional Political Inequality in Africa. *Comparative Political Studies*. 54(14), 2546–2580. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414021997176>
- [23] Ricart-Huguet, J., 2022. The Origins of Colonial Investments in Former British and French Africa. *British Journal of Political Science*. 52(2), 736–757. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123420000678>
- [24] Woodberry, R.D., 2012. The Missionary Roots of Liberal Democracy. *American Political Science Review*. 106(2), 244–274. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055412000093>
- [25] Taiwo, C.O., 1980. *The Nigerian Education System: Past, Present and Future*. Thomas Nelson (Nigeria) Limited: Lagos, Nigeria.
- [26] Odeajo, O., Odefadehan, C., 2025. Investigating the Current State of Educational Facilities in Secondary Schools in Lagos, Nigeria. *Journal of Education Research and Library Practice*. 9(8). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.70382/ajerlp.v9i8.041>
- [27] Becker, B., 2021. The Colonial Struggle over Polygamy: Consequences for Educational Expansion in Sub-Saharan Africa. *Economic History of Developing Regions*. 37(1), 27–49. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/20780389.2021.1940946>
- [28] Olaleye, E.O., Afolabi, O., Osadebe, F.O., et al., 2025. Impact of School Facilities and Class Size on Students Academic Performance in English Language in Public Secondary Schools in Ibadan North Local Government Area, Oyo State, Nigeria. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science*. 9(8), 5988–5998. DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.908000489>
- [29] Iwunna, P., 2010. Textbook Illustrations as Tools of Educational Reinforcement in Catholic Primary Schools in Igboland, Southeast Nigeria (1925–1960). In: Heinze, C., Matthes, E. (eds.). *Das Bild im Schulbuch: Beiträge zur historischen und systematischen Schulbuchforschung*. Julius Klinkhardt: Bad Heilbrunn, Germany. pp. 219–231. (in German)
- [30] Nwosu, V.A., 1990. *The Laity and the Growth of the Catholic Church in Nigeria: The Onitsha Story 1903–1983*. Africana-FEP Publishers Limited: Onitsha, Nigeria.
- [31] Zachernuk, P.S., 1998. African History and Imperial Culture in Colonial Nigerian Schools. *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*. 68(4), 484–505.
- [32] Hedde-von Westernhagen, C., Becker, B., 2022. Mapping Missions: New Data for the Study of African History. *Research Data Journal for the Humanities and Social Sciences*. 7(1), 1–33.
- [33] Adekilekun, A., 2026. When Classrooms Fell Silent: How the Biafran War Broke Education in Southeastern Nigeria. Available from: <https://historicalnigeria.com/when-classrooms-fell-silent-how-the-biafran-war-broke-education-in-southeastern-nigeria/> (cited 3 June 2026).
- [34] Taylor, W.H., 1996. *Mission to Educate: A History of the Educational Work of the Scottish Presbyterian Mission in East Nigeria, 1846–1960*. E.J. Brill: Leiden, The Netherlands.
- [35] Isichei, E., 1976. *A History of the Igbo People*. Macmillan: London, UK.
- [36] Nwaka, J.C., 2012. The Early Missionary Groups and the Contest for Igboland: A Reappraisal of Their Evangelization Strategies. *Missiology: An International Review*. 40(4), 447–460. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/009182961204000403>
- [37] Walls, A.F., 2002. *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History*. Orbis Books: Maryknoll, NY, USA.
- [38] Omolewa, M., 2008. Programmed for Failure? The Colonial Factor in the Mass Literacy Campaign in Nigeria, 1946–1956. *International Journal of the History of Education*. 44(1–2), 107–121.
- [39] Iwunna, P.U., Dimonye, S.C., Ari, A.O., et al., 2022. English Language: A Symbol of the British Government’s Colonial Dominance over Nigeria (1861–1960). In: Abdulrahman, Y.M., Anyaogu, R.O., Izuagba, N.J., et al. (eds.). *International and Intercultural Education: Cross-Cultural Approach*. Cel Wil Publishers: Port Harcourt, Nigeria. pp. 639–647.
- [40] Advisory Committee on Native Education in the British Tropical African Dependencies, 1925. *Education Policy in British Tropical Africa*. His Majesty’s Stationery Office: London, UK.
- [41] Jordan, J.P., 1949. *Bishop Shanahan of Southern Nigeria*. Clonmore and Reynolds: Dublin, Ireland.