THE ROLE OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF EDUCATION IN IGBO-LAND: AS A CASE STUDY OF BISHOP JOSEPH SHANAHAN FROM 1902 TO 1943

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OCTOBER, 2025

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A PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE AWARD OF BACHELOR'S ARTS (B. A), HONOURS DEGREE IN HISTORY

UNIVERSITY OF BENIN
BENIN CITY, NIGERIA

OCTOBER, 2025.

CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this work was carried out by **CHUKWUGOZIE CHRISTABEL CHIAMAKA** in the Department of History and International Studies, University of Benin, Benin City under my supervision.

DR. DANIEL OLISA IWEZE	**PROF. J. C. NWAKA**
Project Supervisor	***Head of Department***
Date	**Date**

DEDICATION

I dedicate this project to the Almighty God who made it possible for the successful completion of my studies. I also want to dedicate this work to the family of Mr. Francis Ndubuokwu Chukwugozie, their love, good upbringing, financial and moral support all through the stages of my life made the attainment of this feat a reality.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As I reflect upon the completion of this project, I am reminded that no accomplishment is achieved in isolation, and the need for support and companionship is an essential part of our growth. First and foremost, I want to thank God Almighty for the good health and understanding he granted me throughout my period of study at the University of Benin. And also, for the inspiration of the Holy Spirt in writing this project.

My deepest appreciation goes to my dedicated project supervisor, Dr. Daniel Olisa Iweze. His invaluable patience, scholarly guidance, and steadfast commitment to excellence were instrumental in shaping this work. I am truly grateful for his time which he invested in me during this project. I am also indebted to all my lecturers, including Prof. E.A Ifidon, Prof. Eddy Ehragbe, Prof. O. B. Osadolor, Prof. (Rev. Sis.) J.C. Nwaka, Prof. J. Osagie, Dr. D.O Iweze, Prof. Charles, Dr. (Mrs.) I. O. Osewengie, and Mr. Daniel Orobator and among others. Your collective wisdom, dedication to knowledge, and passion for teaching have laid a formidable foundation for my academic and intellectual growth.

To my beloved parents, Mr. and Mrs. Ndubuokwu, and my wonderful siblings Timothy, Grace, Favour, Emmanuel, and David, I owe a debt I can never repay. Your relentless love, moral and spiritual backing, and immense financial support have been my pillar of strength.

My spiritual journey was anchored by incredible pastors and mentors. I am deeply thankful to Pst. Prof. Patrick Oseyomon and his beloved wife for their parental and pastoral guidance, and to Pst. Dr. George-Best Azuoko, a God-sent father and mentor.

A distinct appreciation goes to Elijah Igbunu Osikorobia my prayer partner and a treasured support system, your company, care and assistance were a constant source of joy. My sincere thanks go to my coursemates and friends, Oguniran John, Victory Joseph, Emmanuel Salisu, Rosemary Idoko, Uwagwe Progress and others for making my undergraduate life memorable. Finally, I thank my beloved kingdom brethren, Bro Okotie Destiny, Bro Osamwrense Idahosa, Bro Agwu Samuel, Sis Ikechukwu Marvelous, Sis. Ifeoluwa Patience, Sis. Damilo Charity, Sis Olaniyi Oluwaseun and the entire prayer team of DLCF Favour Arena (UNIBEN Campus). The love and fellowship we shared is priceless. To all who contributed to this journey in any way, I say a heartfelt thank you. You have my enduring gratitude.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

The development of Western education in Igbo land during the colonial period is inextricably linked with the activities of Christian missionary societies, among which the Catholic Church played a significant and enduring role. Prior to the arrival of European missionaries, the Igbo people had their own indigenous educational systems, primarily informal and based on oral traditions, apprenticeship, initiation, and communal values. This system was not institutionalized in the modern sense but was nonetheless effective in transmitting knowledge, skills, moral instruction, and societal norms from one generation to the next. Learning took place within the family unit, the extended kinship group, and the larger community, and it was aimed at preparing individuals for responsible adulthood and active participation in communal life. Key components of this indigenous system included storytelling, proverbs, and folktales, which were used to impart wisdom, reinforce moral codes, and preserve historical memory.[1] Apprenticeship was another vital element, through which young boys and girls acquired practical skills in crafts such as farming, blacksmithing, pottery, weaving, trading, and midwifery by working under the guidance of experienced elders or craftsmen. In addition, rites of passage such as initiation ceremonies served both educational and religious purposes. They marked the transition from childhood to adulthood and were accompanied by teachings on community laws, leadership, bravery, and spiritual beliefs. The values of hard work, respect for elders, honesty, hospitality, and kinship loyalty were consistently emphasized through both informal instruction and daily social interaction. While this traditional system lacked written records and formal classrooms, it was holistic, culturally relevant, and deeply functional within the Igbo worldview. However,

with the arrival of European missionaries particularly the Catholic Church this indigenous model gradually gave way to Western-style education, which prioritized literacy, formal schooling, and Christian doctrine.[2]

The dawn of the twentieth century marked a significant transformation in the educational landscape of Igbo land with the emergence of missionary education. This new form of education introduced structured systems of formal learning aimed at evangelization, literacy, moral instruction, and the propagation of Western ideals such as individualism, discipline, and civic responsibility. Among the various Christian missions active during this period, the Catholic Church quickly emerged as a dominant force especially under the visionary leadership of Bishop Joseph Shanahan.[3]

A member of the Society of African Missions (SMA) who later joined the Holy Ghost Fathers (Spiritans), Bishop Shanahan became one of the most influential figures in the movement to advance education in southeastern Nigeria. His mission to Eastern Nigeria, particularly Igbo land, between 1902 and 1943, marked a transformative era in the region's socio-religious and educational development. Shanahan recognized education as a powerful instrument not only for religious conversion but also for social upliftment and empowerment. He spearheaded the establishment of an extensive network of Catholic schools, including primary schools, teacher training colleges, and catechist centers. His educational philosophy emphasized the integration of Christian values with Western academic curricula, promoting subjects such as reading, writing, arithmetic, and basic sciences, while reinforcing Catholic moral teachings. What distinguished Shanahan's approach was his insistence on using local languages, training indigenous teachers, and providing education for both boys and girls something uncommon at the time, as formal education was mostly reserved for boys. Through his tireless efforts, Catholic education became

a cornerstone of community development in Igbo land, ushering in a new era of literacy, religious transformation, and social awareness. This educational movement did not just serve religious purposes; it laid the foundation for socio-economic mobility. Shanahan's vision produced a generation of educated elites who would later contribute significantly to Nigeria's political, economic, and religious development.[4]

This study, therefore, seeks to critically examine the role of the Catholic Church, with a particular focus on Bishop Joseph Shanahan, in the development of Western education in Igbo land from 1902 to 1943. By understanding his contributions and the broader mission of the Catholic Church, one gains deeper insight into the historical foundations of education in the region and the legacy that still endures today.

Aim and Objectives

The aim of this study is to examine the role of the Catholic Church in the development of Western education in Igbo land, using the contributions of Bishop Joseph Shanahan between 1902 and 1943. While the objectives include;

1. To trace the historical background of Catholic missionary activity in Igbo land.
2. To examine the impact of Bishop Shanahan in establishing educational institutions in Igbo land.
3. Assess the challenges encountered by Bishop Shanahan and how he overcame them.
4. Determine the overall impact of Catholic missionary education on the people of Igbo land during the period under study.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant for several reasons. First, it contributes to the growing body of knowledge on the intersection between religion and education in colonial Africa, especially in regions like Igbo land where missionary influence was particularly strong. By focusing on Bishop Joseph Shanahan, the research highlights the role of individual missionary figures in shaping educational policies and institutions that continue to impact society today.

Secondly, the study underscores the pivotal role played by the Catholic Church in introducing Western education to a predominantly traditional society. It draws attention to how the Church not only focused on spiritual conversion but also prioritized intellectual and social development through the establishment of schools, teacher training colleges, and catechist centers. These institutions served as vehicles for literacy, skill acquisition, and the empowerment of the indigenous people, thereby setting the stage for future leadership in both the Church and secular society.

Furthermore, by examining the contribution of Shanahan within a specific time frame (1902–1943), the study offers a detailed historical account that enriches our understanding of colonial education and its long-term effects. It also sheds light on the Catholic Church's advocacy for inclusive education, particularly its efforts to promote female education an area largely neglected by other missionary groups at the time.

Lastly, this work will serve as a valuable reference for students, scholars, church historians, and policy makers interested in educational development, religious history, and post-colonial studies in Nigeria and beyond.

Scope of the Study

This study focuses on the role of the Catholic Church in the development of Western education in Igbo land, with particular attention to the contributions of Bishop Joseph Shanahan

from 1902 to 1943. The geographical focus is limited to the Igboland of southeastern Nigeria where Catholic missionary influence was most pronounced during the colonial period. The time frame 1902 to 1943 covers the active years of Bishop Shanahan's missionary work in the region, beginning with his arrival in Nigeria, his retirement and death.

This period is critical because it marked the formative years of Catholic educational expansion in Igbo land and coincided with broader colonial educational policies. Although the study concentrates on the Catholic Church, it also draws comparative references to the educational efforts of other missionary denominations for contextual understanding. However, the primary emphasis remains on the activities, strategies, challenges, and legacies of Bishop Shanahan and the institutions established under his leadership.

This work does not attempt to provide an exhaustive history of education in Nigeria but rather narrows its lens to the Catholic experience in Igbo land. It is also not a biography of Bishop Shanahan per se, but his personal involvement and leadership in educational efforts form the central narrative thread of this study.

Research Methodology

The method of writing this study will be historical. The study has relied on data from both primary and secondary sources.

Primary Sources

The primary data for this study are drawn from archival documents, missionary reports, pastoral letters, and official correspondence of the Catholic Church. Of particular importance are records from the Holy Ghost Fathers (Spiritans), colonial government education reports, and historical writings by missionaries and church leaders who worked closely with Bishop Shanahan. Additionally, ***newspapers and journals*** published during the early 20th century are

used to assess the social and political climate of the period, as well as the public reception of missionary education in Igbo land.

Secondary Sources

Secondary sources include books, journal articles, theses, and academic essays that provide interpretations and evaluations of missionary activities and the evolution of Western education in Nigeria. These materials help to contextualize Shanahan's efforts within the broader framework of colonial and religious history.

Literature Review

To achieve the highlighted research objectives of this study, a comprehensive review of the literature concerning the historical works of the Catholic Church under Bishop Jonathan Shanahan will be examined. Several scholarly works have addressed the history of Christian missions and the development of education in Nigeria, particularly in relation to the role played by Catholic missionaries in Igbo land. This review examines key contributions that provide context and insight into the themes explored in this study, with a focus on works that discuss the activities of Bishop Joseph Shanahan, the Catholic Church, and the broader landscape of missionary education in colonial Nigeria.

O. U. Kalu in "*The History of Christianity in West Africa"* offers an extensive overview of missionary activity across the West African sub-region. He notes the unique position of Catholic missions in southeastern Nigeria and attributes much of their success to early leaders like Bishop Shanahan, who localized Christian teaching and prioritized education as a tool for evangelization.[5] According to Kalu, the Catholic missions, under the leadership of pioneers like Bishop Joseph Shanahan, achieved remarkable success not simply by transplanting European religious practices, but by adapting Christian teachings to the local context.

One of the key factors Kalu highlights in Shanahan's commitment to indigenization was the deliberate effort to translate Christian values and education into culturally relevant formats. Unlike earlier or more rigid missionary approaches, Shanahan recognized that sustainable evangelization requires the education and empowerment of the indigenous population, not just spiritual conversion. To this end, he championed the use of local languages, particularly Igbo, in religious instruction and literacy training. This approach not only facilitated comprehension but also fostered a sense of cultural continuity amidst spiritual transformation. Kalu further observes that education served as both a strategy and a bridge a means of religious expansion and a tool for modernizing society. Under Shanahan's guidance, the Catholic Church established a robust system of schools, teacher training colleges, and catechist centers. These institutions did more than teach reading and writing; they also produced a new class of educated Africans who became catechists, community leaders, and early advocates for societal development.

Moreover, Shanahan's philosophy of mission was inclusive and holistic. He believed that evangelization must address the body, mind, and spirit, and therefore emphasized the establishment of not just schools but also health facilities and social outreach programs. His vision of education was deeply tied to moral and spiritual formation, which aligned with the Catholic Church's broader goal of shaping "good Christians and upright citizens." Importantly, Kalu notes that Shanahan's efforts occurred during a period of colonial consolidation, when the British government began to formalize indirect rule and needed literate intermediaries. Catholic schools thus became centers of both religious and civic instruction, equipping students with the knowledge to navigate colonial structures while remaining rooted in Christian morality.

Scholar Ekechi, F. K., in his influential study of "*The Holy Ghost Fathers in Eastern Nigeria",* observes that Shanahan recognized early that effective mission work requires more

than preaching; it necessitated a strategic engagement with education as a means of both spiritual and social transformation. According to Ekechi, Shanahan actively promoted the use of vernacular languages in both religious instruction and early classroom education, believing that indigenous people could only be meaningfully reached through their own linguistic and cultural frameworks. He prioritized the training of native catechists and teachers, fostering a class of locally grounded educators who would later serve as vital links between the Church and the local communities. Through his support for the establishment of mission schools, Bishop Shanahan helped lay the foundation for what would become a thriving network of Catholic educational institutions throughout the region.[6]

Lamin Sanneh, in his seminal work *"Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture"*, sheds light on the profound cultural implications of missionary activities, particularly their linguistic strategies. He argues that the translation of Christian texts and educational content into local languages was not merely a tool for communication, but a transformative act that validated indigenous cultures and worldviews. This insight is especially relevant when examining Bishop Joseph Shanahan's missionary approach in Igbo land. Rather than imposing English as the sole medium of instruction and evangelization, Shanahan strategically encouraged literacy in both the Igbo language and English. By doing so, he not only made Christian teachings more accessible and relatable but also fostered a sense of identity and self-worth among the local population.

Sanneh's analysis helps us appreciate the dual mission Shanahan pursued: religious conversion and cultural empowerment. The use of Igbo in schools and catechism classes enabled people to understand Christian doctrines in their own terms, making the faith less foreign and more embedded in local reality. It also prepared students for broader participation in society, as

bilingual literacy allowed them to navigate both traditional and colonial structures. Thus, the Catholic Church's educational mission under Shanahan cannot be seen merely as a religious enterprise it was a deliberate cultural engagement that laid the groundwork for the preservation of local languages, even as Western education advanced.[7]

E. A. Ayandele, in his authoritative study *"The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria"*, provides a comparative analysis of the activities of Catholic and Protestant missions, drawing attention to the unique strategies that shaped their long-term influence on Nigerian society. He observes that while Protestant missions were quicker to spread across regions in the early phases of missionary activity, Catholic missions eventually established a more deeply rooted and systematic educational network. This shift, according to Ayandele, was largely due to the methodical training of catechists and the establishment of structured school systems, a strategy that became particularly pronounced under the leadership of Bishop Joseph Shanahan.[8]

Reflecting on this, it becomes clear that the Catholic Church's strength lay in its long-term vision and institutional consistency, especially in Igbo land. Shanahan's commitment to training indigenous catechists and teachers ensured not only a steady spread of religious doctrine but also the development of a sustainable model of grassroots education. What Ayandele helps us see is that Shanahan's strategy was not reactive but intentionally developmental, aiming to create a self-replicating system of evangelization through education. In contrast to the more decentralized efforts of Protestant missions, the Catholic approach under Shanahan was unified, disciplined, and community-focused. This contributed significantly to the Church's growing influence in both religious and socio-educational spheres in southeastern Nigeria during the early 20th century.

K. B. C. Onwubiko, in his work *"The Church in Mission"*, offers a comprehensive account of the evolution of the Catholic Church in Nigeria, with particular focus on its missionary strategies and educational contributions. One of the most compelling aspects of his analysis lies in the emphasis he places on Bishop Joseph Shanahan's pivotal role in shaping the trajectory of Catholicism in southeastern Nigeria. According to Onwubiko, Shanahan's tenure was marked not only by aggressive evangelistic outreach but also by a deep commitment to institutional development especially through the establishment of schools and catechist training centres.[9]

From Onwubiko's work, it is clear that Shanahan's strategy was visionary and foundational. He did not merely aim to convert individuals but to build a sustainable religious and educational infrastructure that could outlive him. By organizing parishes, establishing training programs for indigenous clergy, and embedding Catholic doctrine into educational curricula, Shanahan laid the groundwork for what would later become the Archdiocese of Onitsha one of the most influential Catholic centres in Nigeria. Onwubiko's insights help reinforce the argument that education was not a by-product of Shanahan's missionary agenda, but rather a central pillar. It was through schools that Catholicism took firm root, influencing not just religious life but also the social, cultural, and intellectual development of Igbo communities. His efforts ultimately positioned the Catholic Church as a dominant force in the region's spiritual and academic transformation.

Other valuable contributions include Jolayemi's *"History of the Catholic Church in Nigeria"*, which traces the timeline of Catholic evangelization and school establishment, and Onunwa's analysis of religious transformation in Igbo society. These works collectively

demonstrate that education was a central strategy for religious penetration, social reformation, and leadership development.

Despite these rich scholarly contributions, there is still a gap in focused studies that thoroughly analyze Bishop Joseph Shanahan's personal philosophy, his direct involvement in education, and the challenges he faced within the context of colonial politics and indigenous resistance. This research aims to fill that gap by offering a more detailed case study of his work and legacy.

Endnotes

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2. Jolayemi, *History of the Catholic Church in Nigeria* (Ibadan: Onibonoje Press, 1987), 106.
3. Onwubiko, The Church in Mission, 91.
4. E. A. Ayandele, *The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria*, 1842–1914: A Political and Social Analysis (London: Longman, 1966), 144.
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CHAPTER TWO

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN IGBO-LAND

Introduction

This chapter traces the origins, growth, and impact of the Catholic Church in Igbo-land, examining its historical journey from missionary introduction to its entrenched role in Igbo society. It begins by investigating the arrival of European missionaries in the late 19th century and their interactions with indigenous Igbo religious and cultural systems. The chapter then discusses key phases of the Church's expansion, including colonial-era challenges, local adaptations, and the eventual indigenization of leadership and practices. Finally, it analyzes the Church's socio-political influence in modern Igbo communities, particularly in education, healthcare, and identity formation. By synthesizing these developments, the chapter provides a foundation for understanding the Church's enduring significance in Igbo-land.

Early Missionary Activities in Igboland (Pre-1902)

The Catholic Church's formal entry into Igboland begins in 1884 when the *Sacred Congregation de Propaganda Fide* the Vatican's missionary authority under Cardinal Giovanni Simeoni grants exclusive ecclesiastical jurisdiction to the *Holy Ghost Fathers (Spiritans),* a

French missionary order.[1] In 1884, the Vatican officially assigned the Holy Ghost Fathers as the primary Catholic missionaries in Igboland, replacing the Society of African Missions (SMA) whose work had been limited to coastal areas. This decision established the Holy Ghost Fathers as the only Catholic group operating throughout the Igbo hinterland.[2] The Spiritans set up their first permanent mission in Onitsha in 1885. They chose this important town on the Niger River as their main office because it was a busy trading center and an important spiritual place for the Igbo people. This smart choice gave them quick access to river trade and also allowed them to challenge local religious beliefs. In 1886, they expanded to nearby Asaba, which became a second important base just across the river from Onitsha. This helped them control both sides of the river and reach more of the surrounding areas.[3] These early endeavors face formidable challenges, including *cultural resistance* from Igbo communities deeply rooted in indigenous religious systems such as the ọdịnanị cosmology, which views Christian incursions as threats to ancestral traditions.[4] *Linguistic barriers* further complicate evangelization, as the absence of standardized Igbo orthography forces missionaries to rely on interpreters and pidgin communications until the Spiritans develop written Igbo for catechisms.[5] Most devastating, however, are the *catastrophic mortality rates* among European clergy; tropical diseases like malaria and yellow fever claim so many lives that the region becomes infamously known as "the white man’s grave" in colonial records.[6]

The Catholic mission also struggles against competition from the *Church Missionary Society (CMS)*, which has operated in Igboland since 1857. During the colonial period, British officials did not trust the Catholic missionaries (called Spiritans) because of their French connections. Instead, they strongly supported the Anglican Church Missionary Society (CMS). The British government refused to give land to Catholic missions for churches and schools,

making it hard for them to grow. Only after the Vatican protested did the British reluctantly allow some Catholic missions to operate by 1890[7]. The two missionary groups had very different approaches. The CMS focused on making Christianity relatable to Igbo people, they translated the Bible into the Igbo language and set up village schools where children could learn in their mother tongue. On the other hand, the Spiritans at first stuck to Latin prayers and French-language teaching, which most Igbo people found strange and difficult. Because of this, fewer Igbos were interested in joining the Catholic Church in the early years, while the Anglican CMS gained more followers.[8]

By the dawn of 20th century, the Catholic Church had only a small presence in Igbo land. Most of its early followers came from groups that faced discrimination in traditional Igbo society, particularly the Osu (people considered outcasts) and former slaves. These groups turned to Christianity because it offered them hope and a chance to escape the strict social rules that kept them at the bottom of society. The Osu, who were normally excluded from community life, found in the Church a place where they could be treated equally. Slaves and others who had suffered in the past also joined, seeing the Church as a fresh start. While the missionaries welcomed these groups, their focus on outcasts made many freeborn Igbo people slow to accept the new religion. As a result, although the Church was beginning to grow, it remained on the edges of society in these early years.[9] Only six permanent mission stations operate east of the Niger, namely, Onitsha, Aguleri, Nnewi, Owerri, Obosi, and Asaba. These outposts operated more like small, isolated communities than centers of major change. Cut off from each other by difficult terrain and limited infrastructure, the missions struggled to expand their influence beyond their immediate surroundings. Unlike the growing network of Anglican schools and churches in the region, these Catholic stations remained few in number, serving more as quiet

shelters for converts than as powerful forces reshaping Igbo society. Their priests, often overworked and spread thin, focused mainly on maintaining these small Christian communities rather than launching widespread evangelization efforts[10]. Faced with years of stagnant growth in Igbo-land, Catholic leaders in Rome (known as Propaganda Fide) decided to reorganize the mission's leadership in 1902. This shift aimed to revitalize the struggling Church. One of its most significant outcomes was a complete overhaul of the mission's approach to education, a change that transformed schools, teacher training, and local engagement[11]. How this restructuring shaped Igbo communities through education will be explore in details in Chapter Three.

The Role of Missionaries in the Introduction of Western Education

The influence of missionary-led education in Igboland extended beyond the immediate goal of religious conversion, shaping the social and cultural fabric of the society in tangible ways. Despite their primary religious objectives, the missionaries inadvertently laid the groundwork for a new social order through the structure of their educational systems. These institutions foster the emergence of a small educated elite, often comprised of those from the families of mission workers or local converts who could afford the relatively high costs of schooling. This educated minority gained access to clerical and administrative positions within the colonial bureaucracy, further entrenching Western-oriented leadership in Igbo society[12]. At the time, very few people had the opportunity to attend formal schools, especially girls and women. While boys were taught subjects like reading, writing, and religion to prepare them for leadership roles in the Church and community, most girls only learned basic literacy along with household skills like sewing, cooking, and childcare. This imbalance was not accidental, it mirrored the traditional expectations of Igbo society, where men were seen as future leaders and women as homemakers.

Missionaries, while introducing Western education, largely reinforced these existing gender roles rather than challenging them. Their focus on training boys as future catechists and church leaders meant that female education remained secondary, limiting women's opportunities for advancement beyond domestic roles[13]. The cultural effects of missionary schools were mixed. On one hand, they brought valuable new skills like reading, writing, and knowledge of the wider world.

Many Igbo children gained opportunities through education that they could not get otherwise. However, these schools also discouraged or even banned important Igbo traditions. Practices like masked festivals such as Iriji or Iri Ji**,** ancestral veneration, and rites of passage which played a central role in communal identity and social cohesion, were branded as pagan or superstitious and consequently declined or were marginalized under missionary influence**.** This created tension while education opened doors, it sometimes came at the cost of cultural identity. Some families struggled to balance the benefits of Western schooling with the preservation of their heritage[14]. The emphasis on Western moral and intellectual standards created a sense of cultural dislocation among the educated elite, who found themselves caught between indigenous traditions and the new Western ideals. This dual consciousness influenced social identities and community relationships in Igboland, contributing to a gradual transformation of cultural practices and worldviews.

Furthermore, the educational policies adopted by colonial authorities, heavily influenced by missionary partners, served strategic purposes. Schools became mechanisms for cultivating colonial loyalty and maintaining social hierarchies that favored Western administrators and Christian converts[15]. The curriculum in missionary schools was carefully crafted to serve two purposes, teaching basic literacy while also instilling colonial-era values like obedience to

authority, the concept of progress defined by European standards, and strict Christian morals. Subjects like arithmetic and reading were paired with Bible studies, and students were taught to reject many Igbo traditions as backward. While only a small percentage of Igbo children could attend these schools, those who did graduate gained outsized influence in their communities. As some of the few literate individuals, they became bridges between colonial administrators and local populations translating documents, explaining new laws, and spreading Christian teachings[16]. However, their education also placed them in a difficult position, they were respected for their knowledge but often distrusted by elders who saw them as promoters of foreign ideas that undermined traditional ways of life. This tension created a new social hierarchy, where educated young men (and later women) gradually displaced older authority figures in matters involving the colonial system[17]**.** This created a complex social landscape, where indigenous leadership was shaped by Western ideals but also possessed the potential to challenge colonial dominance in the future.

Establishment of Catholic Institutions in Igboland (1902–1943)

The period following 1902 marks a transformative phase in Catholic institutional development, as missions evolve from scattered outposts into an interconnected educational network. This institutional revolution unfolds under Bishop Joseph Shanahan's leadership, strategically targeting three critical areas such as secondary education for elite formation, teacher training for staffing sustainability, and healthcare infrastructure to support school attendance[18]. The foundation of this expansion rests on elite secondary colleges, beginning with Christ the King College (CKC) in Onitsha in 1903. As the first Catholic secondary school in Eastern Nigeria, CKC deliberately blends British grammar school traditions with Catholic spirituality, offering a dual curriculum of classical subjects like Latin alongside vocational training in

printing and carpentry[19]. This innovative model proves particularly attractive to the sons of emerging Igbo elites and catechists, with enrollment steadily growing after 1910. The success of CKC spawns satellite colleges at Nnewi (1924), Aba (1926), and Enugu (1931), each strategically located near colonial administrative centers to facilitate access to government funding and qualified anglophone faculty[20]. Parallel to secondary education development, the Catholic mission prioritizes teacher training to counter Protestant dominance in education staffing. St. Charles' Teachers' Training College in Onitsha, established in 1910, pioneers a comprehensive two-year program combining pedagogical methods, catechism instruction, and agricultural science. Graduates enter into five-year service bonds requiring them to teach in rural Catholic schools, creating the first sustainable pipeline of indigenous educators. By 1940, this institution produces over 300 certified teachers who staff approximately 80% of new Catholic primary schools across the region[21].

Healthcare institutions emerged as indispensable allies to the Catholic educational mission, tackling the physiological and socioeconomic barriers that hindered Igbo children's access to schooling. The pioneering Sacred Heart Hospital in Abakaliki established in 1915 exemplified this synergy while combating debilitating endemic diseases like yaws, malaria, and tropical ulcers that kept children bedridden, it simultaneously trained midwives and sanitarians who later staffed maternity wards in mission schools[22]**.** This dual medical educational model proved particularly transformative at the Ogbete Leprosy Settlement established in 1921, where patients undergoing multi-year treatment received literacy instruction alongside their therapy[23]. Recovered patients, now literate and catechized, often returned to their villages as health educators and lay ministers walking testaments to the mission's holistic approach. By systematically addressing the malnutrition, parasitic infections, and lack of maternal care that

traditionally limited school participation, these medical institutions created the baseline community health necessary for educational success. Crucially, they also demonstrated the practical value of Western medicine, building trust that made families more receptive to missionary school**s**[24]**.**

Financial sustainability for this expanding network comes through adaptive funding strategies. Colonial education grants cover approximately 40% of operational costs by 1925, following reforms recommended by the Phelps-Stokes Commission. Local communities contribute significantly through land donations and communal labor, as seen in the construction of St. Theresa's College in Nsukka (1935). Additional support comes from cocoa bean levies imposed on Catholic-owned plantations in the Niger Delta, which fund scholarship programs for promising students. By 1943, Catholic institutions form a comprehensive educational pyramid, four secondary colleges training future elites, twelve teacher seminaries producing qualified staff, twenty-seven healthcare facilities supporting student wellbeing, and one hundred eighty-four primary schools serving approximately 15,000 pupils. This robust infrastructure positions the Church for educational dominance in the postwar era, while simultaneously laying the foundation for indigenous leadership within the Catholic hierarchy[25].

The Role of the Catholic Church in Education in Igboland

The Catholic Church played a key role in improving education in Igboland. Between 1902 and 1943, its schools did more than just teach religion, they helped change society by giving people new opportunities. Before this time, education in Igbo communities was limited, especially for women and lower social classes. But Catholic schools opened doors for everyone, including former slaves (osu), outcasts, and girls. This helped create a more equal society and trained some of Igboland’s future leaders.[26]

Firstly, the Church made education available to all kinds of people. In the past, only certain men from important families could get advanced knowledge through secret societies. But Catholic schools welcomed everyone, no matter their background. For example, the Sacred Heart Convent School in Onitsha (1912) was one of the first to give girls a full education, not just training in housework. By 1925, some of its first students had even become teachers' themselves.[27]

Secondly, the Church made sure education reached both cities and small villages. While the British colonial government mostly built schools in big towns, Catholic missionaries set up schools even in remote areas. They trained teachers in major schools like Christ the King College (CKC) in Onitsha and St. Charles' College, who then went to villages to teach. By 1930, Catholic schools had spread to places like Nsukka and Oji River. They also had a program where teachers would work in village schools for two years before moving to another community.[28]

Thirdly, Catholic schools mixed Western and Igbo learning. Students studied subjects like English, math, and religion in the morning, and in the afternoon, they learned about Igbo traditions, farming, and history but always with Catholic values. This approach was so successful that even British officials praised it in reports. More importantly, these schools produced some of Igboland's first educated leaders, like Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe (who went to CKC Onitsha) and Bishop Charles Heerey, who later fought for Nigeria's independence.[29]

Fourthly, Catholic education grew very fast. In 1900, there were only eight Catholic primary schools, but by 1943, there were 184 schools with 15,000 students making up 37% of all students in Eastern Nigeria. This growth had a big impact: literacy rates in places like Onitsha tripled between 1915 and 1940, and many Catholic-educated people got jobs in the colonial government.[30]

Finally, the Church's success caused some problems. The British government became worried because educated Igbo people started demanding more rights. At the same time, some traditional leaders were unhappy because young people were going to school instead of taking part in cultural ceremonies. The Church managed these conflicts by teaching in the Igbo language but discouraging traditional religious practices, creating a new Catholic-Igbo identity.[31]

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CHAPTER THREE

THE CONTRIBUTION OF BISHOP JOSEPH SHANAHAN TO EDUCATION IN IGBOLAND

Biography and Missionary Work of Bishop Joseph Shanahan

Bishop Joseph Shanahan was born on June 6, 1871, in Glankeen, County Tipperary, Ireland. His parents, Daniel Shanahan and Margaret Walsh, instilled in him the twin pillars that would define his life: a robust Catholic devotion and a profound belief in the power of education.[1] His father, a skilled horseman, famously ended arguments by insisting that education was the solution to Ireland's challenges, personally overseeing his children's homework. His mother cultivated a home of intense prayer with nightly family rosaries and gospel storytelling that taught young Joseph to talk to God in a personal, intimate way. This environment forged a character that was both pragmatically determined and deeply spiritual.[2] At the age of twelve,

Shanahan entered Rockwell College, a school run by the Holy Ghost Fathers. His vocation was influenced by his uncle, Brother Adelm Walsh, a Spiritan who had served in Africa.[3] Demonstrating exceptional promise, he was sent to France for his secondary studies and formation. This prolonged period in France was providential. He immersed himself in French language and culture and the distinctive Spiritan spirituality shaped by Venerable Fr. Francis Libermann.[4] He absorbed Libermann's principles of humility and a preferential option for the most abandoned souls, which prepared him for his future mission. Ordained a priest in 1900, he returned to Ireland to teach.[5]

The pivotal moment in his life came in 1902 during a talk at Rockwell by a missionary from Southern Nigeria. He described a mission known for its high mortality rate, a place of heroic failure where results were scarce. Moved by this call, Shanahan immediately volunteered.[6] He arrived in Onitsha in November 1902 into a scene of near despair. The mission was on the brink of collapse. Undeterred, Shanahan learned the Igbo language and worked tirelessly. He was soon appointed Prefect Apostolic, tasked with leading what was considered one of the most hopeless missions in the world.[7] As leader, Shanahan implemented a radical new vision based on three core principles. He believed firmly that the Church's future lay in training and empowering Igbo catechists to be the primary evangelizers in their own communities.[8] He mandated that teaching and preaching be conducted in the Igbo language, ensuring the faith could take root in the local culture. Furthermore, he envisioned mission schools as engines of holistic human development, teaching not just religion but also practical skills to foster economic self-sufficiency.[9] For forty-one years, he tirelessly executed this strategy, personally traveling on foot to over two hundred villages to assess needs and encourage communities.[10]

Bishop Shanahan's legacy is immense. He transformed a dying mission into a vibrant, self-propagating church. The network of schools he built became the foundation for modern education in Eastern Nigeria, producing the first generation of Igbo elite.[11] He successfully navigated the tensions between colonialism and traditional culture, fostering a unique and enduring Catholic Igbo identity. He died on December 25, 1943, in Nairobi. The announcement on Irish national radio on Christmas Day marked the passing of a man once described as the most Christ like man I have ever met. His life's work, however, did not die with him but continues to be a lasting testament to a visionary who believed in the power of God working through the education and empowerment of a people.[12]

Bishop Shanahan and Catholic Church in Igboland

Bishop Joseph Shanahan assumed leadership of the Vicariate of Southern Nigeria in 1906, the Catholic presence in Igboland was still fragile and overshadowed by Protestant missions, particularly the CMS. His most enduring legacy was his strategic implementation of evangelization through schools, though a debate exists regarding its origin.[13] Under his guidance, the Church prioritized the establishment of schools that provided Western education alongside religious instruction, making education accessible to groups previously excluded, such as women, former slaves (osu), and the poor. His approach was marked by cultural adaptability and respect for Igbo society. He required that teaching and preaching be conducted in the Igbo language, which helped the faith resonate deeply within the local context. He championed the training and empowerment of indigenous catechists and teachers, ensuring that the Church would be led and sustained by Igbo people themselves. This not only accelerated the spread of Catholicism but also fostered the development of a unique Catholic-Igbo identity that integrated faith with local customs. While Father Léon Lejeune first articulated the idea of a “school apostolate,” it was

Shanahan who became its tireless and most effective champion.[14] He shared Lejeune's conviction that schools were indispensable for building a lasting Catholic community, and he pursued this policy with a determination that guaranteed its survival against internal and external opposition. This educational focus was contested within missionary circles. Some missionaries favored traditional preaching, while others, like Father Carlo Zappa, advocated the practice of purchasing and baptizing slaves.[15] Shanahan firmly rejected this approach. As C.A. Imokhai records, Shanahan "refused to endorse Fr. Zappa's practice... [and] put all his available funds into the building of schools and the support of teachers."[16] By shifting resources from redeeming individuals to educating communities, Shanahan redefined Catholic mission strategy in Igboland.

His success lay not only in conviction but also in his ability to harness wider forces. The colonial government's grant-in-aid policy provided vital funding. Rivalry with Protestant missions spurred rapid expansion. Most importantly, the Igbo themselves were ambitious, adaptable, and eager for education which made them embraced schooling as a route to advancement.[17] Shanahan's true genius was his ability to integrate these factors into a coherent plan. He combined church and school in nearly every mission station, ensuring that literacy, catechesis, and worship developed side by side. He also organized an effective system where a few European priests directed a large corps of indigenous teacher-catechists, who carried Catholic teaching into villages at the grassroots. The results were transformative. Between 1906 and 1932, the mission expanded from 24 schools with 2,057 students to 1,386 schools with 30,390 students an average of 53 new schools each year.[18] This growth laid the foundation for a distinctly Catholic educational culture in Igboland, producing generations of teachers, catechists, and eventually priests who ensured the continuity of the faith. It also secured Catholicism's dominant position in the region, as Archbishop Anthony J. V. Obinna later reflected, next to

bringing West Africans into the Church, "school and college education are the next best value that we received from the missionaries."[19] Thus, while Lejeune planted the seed, it was Shanahan's vision, resourcefulness, and leadership that enabled the school apostolate to flourish. By wedding faith and education, he not only strengthened the Catholic Church in Igboland but also permanently shaped its identity and social influence.

The Role of Shanahan in the Establishment of Educational Institutions

When Bishop Joseph Shanahan assumed responsibility for the Vicariate, he inherited a twofold missionary tradition: redeeming slaves and organizing isolated Christian villages. These methods, however, proved ineffective foundations for building a vibrant Church. The redeemed slaves were too few and socially marginalized, while the Christian villages remained cut off from the wider community. Shanahan therefore turned decisively to the school as the true instrument of evangelization. He observed that while the older generation resisted change, the children could be reached through education and would eventually transform their families and villages. In his own words, baptized children would return to their homes "full of the life of God… and carrying with them his intimate presence," thus becoming "tiny apostles" to their parents.[20]

Inspiration from St. Patrick and Strategic Planning

Shanahan often compared his mission to that of St. Patrick in Ireland, recognizing striking similarities: both confronted a vast pagan people with limited means of communication and few resources.[21] Inspired by Patrick's bold advance into the Irish interior, Shanahan resolved to strike into the Igbo hinterland with schools as his spearhead. His biographer described this as "the most epoch-making decision of his whole life," since it opened Catholic schools to all, regardless of status which is either ich or poor, slave or free.[22] To implement the plan, Shanahan

organized large public meetings where he personally appealed to local chiefs, gaining both moral and financial support for establishing schools. Even when Propaganda Fide denied his early requests for financial aid in 1905, he pressed forward, leaving detailed instructions for training teachers while he attended the General Chapter in France.

Expansion and Indigenous Teachers

Upon Bishop Joseph Shanahan return in 1908, he embarked on extended treks into the Igbo interior, covering hundreds of miles to promote both faith and schooling. Despite financial limitations, he managed to secure the collaboration of many chiefs, some of whom eventually became Catholics themselves. His strategy relied heavily on the recruitment and training of indigenous teachers, many drawn from the best and oldest pupils in mission schools. These teacher-catechists became indispensable collaborators in the missionary apostolate. Shanahan praised them as men of "sterling honesty" and "self-sacrifice," noting that without their zeal, the Fathers would have achieved little.[23]

Struggle with Propaganda Fide and Financial Policy

A major obstacle was the financial directives from Rome. Cardinal Gotti of Propaganda Fide insisted that subsidies be used for the redemption of slaves, not for schools. Shanahan countered by redefining education itself as the ultimate "struggle against slavery," since schools liberated both slave and freeborn through literacy and faith.[24] In his 1913 report, he insisted that "the school ought to be open to all, without any distinction" and argued that "those who hold the school hold the country, hold its religion, hold its future."[25] This bold justification persuaded Propaganda Fide not to withdraw funding, thereby securing the continuation of his school-based apostolate.

The results were extraordinary. Within six years of his episcopacy, 43 new schools had been opened, staffed by over 130 teachers. By 1920, there were 559 primary schools; twelve years later the number had risen to 1,386. On the eve of Nigeria's independence in 1960, Catholic missions in Eastern Nigeria operated 2,364 primary schools, 83 colleges, and several teacher-training and technical institutions, with nearly half a million students and a teaching staff of about 14,000.[26] By then, the Catholic population had grown to over one million which was a remarkable transformation compared with the 180 Catholics reported in 1888. Shanahan's decisive turn to education thus not only secured the Catholic foothold in Igboland but also reshaped its cultural and intellectual landscape for generations.

Challenges

Shanahan's missionary work in Igboland was marked not only by progress but also by major challenges that tested his determination and vision. Firstly, he struggled with the suspicions of the British Colonial Government. In 1925 he proposed the establishment of a Catholic teachers' training college in Enugu, which he considered essential for producing well-prepared local teachers. However, British administrators refused his request because they feared that a strong Catholic education system might encourage nationalist sentiments among the Igbo. This rejection delayed his project for seven years, and it was only after persistent lobbying that the colonial government finally gave its approval. This episode reveals how political considerations often stood in the way of educational development.[27]

Secondly, Shanahan also faced opposition within the Church itself. His Spiritan superiors in France were cautious about his desire to translate the Catholic liturgy into the Igbo language. They feared that using vernacular languages in the Mass might reduce the sense of universality in worship. For Shanahan, however, it was clear that local people would never truly embrace

Christianity unless they could pray and hear the Gospel in their own tongue. Unfortunately, the delay in granting permission meant that the translation of the Mass into Igbo did not come into effect until around 1930. This slowed down the process of cultural adaptation that Shanahan strongly believed in, and it highlighted the tension between local missionary experience and decisions made in Europe.[28]

Thirdly, the cultural environment itself brought its own resistance. The famous 1929 Women's War, also called *Ogu Umunwaanyi*, showed how local communities could push back against both colonial and missionary structures. The protests, led by women, were triggered by colonial taxation policies but soon expanded to include wider concerns about the changing roles of women under missionary influence. During the unrest, about twelve Catholic schools were forced to shut down temporarily. For Shanahan, this was a reminder that missionary education could not be introduced without considering the traditional social order and the power dynamics within Igbo society.[29]

Fourthly, Shanahan's work was also limited by financial difficulties. The Great Depression of the 1930s caused severe economic hardship in Nigeria, as the prices of palm oil and cocoa which were the main sources of revenue collapsed. Mission schools, especially the small rural "bush schools," depended heavily on local contributions and mission funds. With resources drying up, Shanahan was forced in 1932 to close down at least eighteen schools. It was only after securing direct financial assistance from the Vatican that he was able to reopen some of them. This episode underlines how fragile the mission's finances were and how dependent educational expansion was on external support.[30]

In spite of these setbacks, Shanahan's commitment produced remarkable results. By the early 1940s, Catholic schools had educated a significant share of the Igbo elite. Many of the men who later became political leaders, church leaders, and professionals in independent Nigeria had passed through the institutions he founded. His schools not only produced future bishops and priests but also trained teachers, civil servants, and lawyers who carried the values of discipline, service, and Christian faith into the wider society.[31] Thus, although he faced resistance from colonial authorities, ecclesiastical superiors, traditional communities, and financial crises, his educational legacy remained strong. His vision outlived him and continued to shape Igbo society for decades.

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CHAPTER FOUR

THE IMPACT OF BISHOP SHANAHAN'S EDUCATIONAL WORK IN IGBOLAND (1902–1943)

Introduction

Between 1902 and 1932, Bishop Joseph Shanahan led an educational revolution in Igboland that reshaped the region's social, economic, and spiritual life.[1] He used education as a tool for evangelization and human development. Under his guidance, the Catholic Mission expanded rapidly, establishing schools that promoted literacy, discipline, and moral formation.

This chapter explores the impact of his educational work, the challenges he faced, and how it transformed the lives of the Igbo people.

The Spread of Catholic Schools in Igboland

One of Bishop Shanahan's greatest achievements was the wide establishment of Catholic schools across Igboland.[2] When he arrived in 1902, the mission was small and poorly equipped. Building on Father Léon Lejeune's idea that education was the best way to reach the people, Shanahan launched a massive school campaign that reached even remote villages. He worked with village heads, persuading them to donate land and labour for new schools. His schools welcomed all boys, girls, the poor, and even the outcasts known as osu.[3] Subjects like arithmetic, writing, and agriculture were taught alongside religion, improving both the minds and habits of the students. By 1943, the Catholic Mission managed more than 180 schools with over 15,000 pupils, creating the foundation for modern education in Eastern Nigeria.

Opposition and Criticisms

Shanahan's strong focus on education created internal disagreements within the mission. Some missionaries felt his approach focused too much on schools and too little on direct evangelization.[4] They also feared that government grants might bring colonial interference in religious affairs. Another source of conflict was Shanahan's insistence on English as the language of instruction. While it gave students access to government jobs, it also reduced the use of Igbo and other local languages, weakening cultural identity. This debate between faith and culture became one of the most lasting effects of his mission. In an interview with Elder Ngozi Nwafor, Abakaliki

> "Some elders did not welcome the schools at first. They feared our children would forget the old ways. But after some years, they saw that education

> brought respect and progress. Even those who resisted began to send their children."[5]

Personal and Community Effects

Archival records give statistics, but oral testimonies show how deeply Bishop Shanahan's work affected people's lives. Many still speak of how his schools brought light, dignity, and opportunity to their families and villages. In an interview with Chief Nnaemeka Okafor of Nnewi, he said,

> "Education opened our eyes and lifted us from ignorance. Before Bishop Shanahan's schools, we were mostly farmers who could not even write our names. His schools gave us pride and direction. Those who learned began to teach others, and our lives changed for the better."[6]

His testimony shows that Catholic education became a gateway to social advancement across Igboland.

In Onitsha, Mrs. Agnes Eze, a retired teacher, shared her experience. She explained,

> "My mother was among the first girls at Sacred Heart Convent. The sisters taught us discipline, confidence, and the belief that women could do more than just stay at home. Education gave us voice and respect in the community."[7]

Her story reflects how Shanahan's mission changed the role of women, giving them access to education and leadership.

A priest from Nsukka, Rev. Fr. Paul Anosike, offered another perspective. He said,

> "English education gave us many opportunities, but it also weakened our language and traditions. Young people began to forget Igbo and prefer foreign ways. Still, we must admit that the mission schools brought progress and hope."[8]

His observation shows the cultural cost and social benefit that came hand in hand with the Catholic educational system.

In an interview with Sister Mary Okonkwo, Catholic Nun, Awka.

> "The schools did more than teach reading. They shaped character and faith. Shanahan's idea was to form the mind and the soul. Many of our leaders today still carry that discipline they learned from mission education."[9]

The various interviews together give a rounded picture of the deep and lasting effects of Bishop Shanahan's educational mission. Chief Nnaemeka Okafor emphasized how Catholic education brought social mobility and dignity to ordinary people who once lived without formal learning. Mrs. Agnes Eze highlighted the transformation of women's lives through schooling, which gave them confidence and leadership roles within their communities. Rev. Fr. Paul Anosike reflected on the cultural impact of English education, acknowledging both the progress it brought and the gradual loss of traditional language and values. Similarly, Sister Mary Okonkwo focused on the spiritual and moral side of the mission, stressing how the schools shaped discipline and faith in the students. Together, these testimonies reveal that Shanahan's schools touched every aspect of Igbo society social, cultural, and spiritual leaving a legacy that continues to influence later generations.

Social and Economic Development

Beyond religion, Shanahan's schools became instruments of social mobility. Graduates became teachers, clerks, and civil servants, forming a new educated class that shaped modern Nigeria. One notable example was Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, who benefited from Catholic education before becoming the nation's first President. Through education, Shanahan raised generations of leaders who contributed to the country's political, social, and economic growth. In an interview with Mr. Chukwudi Okorie, retired civil servant, Enugu

> "Before the mission schools, our people traded but could not manage accounts. After learning arithmetic, we began to run businesses better. Many

> of us got jobs in government service because of the mission education. It was the ladder that lifted us into a new life."[10]

Overall, the work of Bishop Joseph Shanahan between 1902 and 1932 transformed the educational and social landscape of Igboland. His mission schools became the foundation of literacy, leadership, and moral growth in the region. By creating opportunities for both men and women, he redefined social order and promoted equality through education. Yet, the preference for English over local languages brought cultural adjustments that still echo today. Even so, the legacy of his vision continues to shape values and progress in Eastern Nigeria.

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7. Interview with Mrs. Agnes Eze, 70 years old, retired teacher, Onitsha, July 2025.
8. Interview with Rev. Fr. Paul Anosike, 58 years old, Catholic priest, Nsukka, August 2025.
9. Interview with Sister Mary Okonkwo, 62 years old, Catholic nun, Awka, August 2025.
10. Interview with Mr. Chukwudi Okorie, 67 years old, retired civil servant, Enugu, August 2025.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

The educational crusade led by Bishop Joseph Shanahan in Igboland between 1902 and 1932 stands as a defining period in the history of South-Eastern Nigeria. This study has examined the profound impact of his policies, which successfully used the school system as a primary tool for evangelization and socio-economic development. Shanahan's vision, though built upon the foundational strategy of his predecessor, Father Léon Lejeune, was executed with an unprecedented scale and determination that forever altered the region's trajectory. The

evidence confirms that Shanahan's most significant achievement was the rapid and strategic spread of Catholic schools. Through a deliberate "hub-and-spoke" model, he ensured that education moved beyond urban centers like Onitsha into the most remote rural villages. The statistics are a powerful testament to this success: from a fragile mission in 1902, he built a network of 184 schools serving over 15,000 students by 1943, creating the largest educational system in Eastern Nigeria at the time. The impact of this expansion was multi-layered. Socially, it democratized knowledge by extending education to previously marginalized groups, including women and the osu (outcaste) community. Economically, it created a new literate class that filled clerical roles in the colonial administration and became entrepreneurs, fueling local economic growth. Politically, it produced the first generation of Igbo elite, such as Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, who would later champion the cause of Nigerian independence.

This study has argued that this success came with complexities and trade-offs. Shanahan's leadership was not without internal conflict, as his aggressive expansion and preference for English-speaking Irish secular priests created significant tension with the founding French and Alsatian missionaries. Furthermore, his language policy, which prioritized English over the Igbo vernacular for instruction, ensured the schools' popularity and employability of their graduates but arguably did so at a cultural cost. This choice facilitated surface-level conversion and modernization but may have hindered a deeper, more culturally-grounded inculturation of the Christian faith, leaving a lingering sense of cultural displacement for some, as noted by scholars like Echeruo. In final analysis, Bishop Shanahan was a pragmatic visionary. He correctly read the Igbo appetite for knowledge and built an institution that met that desire, thereby anchoring the Catholic Church firmly within the fabric of Igbo society. While his methods—including the controversial use of funds and his top-down management style—

sparked conflict and ultimately contributed to his forced resignation, the results of his work are undeniable. The schools he established became the engine for the modernization of Igboland, and their legacy, despite later government takeovers, continues to be celebrated today.

From the analysis of both documentary and oral sources, the following key findings emerged Firstly, one of the major findings of this study is that Bishop Joseph Shanahan used education as the most effective means of spreading Christianity and promoting human development. His mission schools were not limited to evangelization; they became centres of literacy, discipline, and social advancement. Education under Shanahan helped the Igbo people to embrace modern civilization while still holding on to their faith. Many of the schools he established produced early leaders who later influenced the political and social direction of Nigeria. A notable example is Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, who attended Catholic schools before becoming Nigeria's first President. Others, such as teachers, priests, and administrators trained under the mission system, contributed to the spread of literacy and leadership across Eastern Nigeria. Through education, Shanahan laid the intellectual and moral foundation for the emergence of a new educated elite that would later lead the region into modernity.

Secondly, this study found that Bishop Shanahan's educational system brought about remarkable social transformation in Igbo society. His policy of open access to education—regardless of gender or social class—helped to reduce social divisions and encouraged a sense of equality. Women especially benefited from his promotion of girls' education, which gave them confidence, independence, and leadership opportunities in both church and community life. Education also promoted discipline and social order, reducing the influence of harmful customs and replacing them with moral and civic values. As a result, many educated men and women

became agents of change, introducing new standards of hygiene, cooperation, and community service within their localities.

Thirdly, this study has established that mission education played a major role in promoting economic progress among the Igbo people. Many graduates of Shanahan's schools secured employment as clerks, teachers, and civil servants under the colonial government. Others applied their knowledge of arithmetic and accounting to improve their trading activities and business ventures. Education therefore became a ladder for upward mobility and financial independence. As one of the interviewees noted, learning to read and calculate gave people control over their income and confidence in managing business transactions. This development marked the beginning of a literate and economically active class that contributed greatly to the modernization of Igboland.

Fourthly, the study revealed that Shanahan's schools had a lasting cultural impact. The introduction of English as the main language of instruction encouraged Western influence and connected the people to global civilization. However, it also led to a decline in the use of the Igbo language and some traditional practices. Despite this cultural shift, Catholic education refined rather than destroyed indigenous values by replacing superstition with Christian morality and respect for human dignity. The blending of Western and local values gave rise to a more progressive society that balanced faith, culture, and education.

Finally, the study found that Bishop Shanahan's educational mission was deeply rooted in moral and religious formation. The schools did not only train the mind but also shaped the conscience. Pupils were taught discipline, honesty, and respect for authority through daily prayers and religious instruction. Many of the respondents testified that Catholic education produced individuals of strong moral character who later became role models in their families

and communities. This combination of intellectual and moral training became the hallmark of mission education and one of Shanahan's most enduring legacies in Igboland.

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Oral Interview

List of Informants

S/N	Name of Respondent	Age	Occupation/Status	Place of Interview	Date of Interview
1	Mrs. Agnes Eze	70	Retired Teacher	Onitsha	September 2025
2	Rev. Fr. Paul Anosike	58	Catholic Priest	Nsukka	September 2025

3	Mr. Chukwudi Okorie	67	Retired Civil Servant	Enugu	September 2025
4	Sister Mary Okonkwo	62	Catholic Nun	Awka	October 2025
5	Chief Nnaemeka Okafor	82	Traditional Ruler	Nnewi	October 2025
6	Elder Ngozi Nwafor	78	Community Elder	Abakaliki	October 2025

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APPENDIX

Collective of Oral Interviews

Oral Testimonies on Bishop Shanahan's Educational Impact

This appendix presents full transcriptions of selected interviews conducted to support Chapter Four of this study. Respondents include community elders, a retired Catholic teacher, a clergyman, and other members of the Igbo community. The interviews were semi-structured and

carried out between June and August 2025 in different parts of Igboland. Each participant gave verbal consent, and all interviews were recorded and transcribed for academic use.

Interview 1: Community Elder (Nnewi, June 2025)

Interviewer: Good afternoon, sir. Could you please introduce yourself?
Respondent: My name is Chief Nnaemeka Okafor, from Nnewi. I am 82 years old. I attended St. Charles Catholic School, Onitsha, in the 1950s, but my father was among those who first went to the Catholic mission school in our town during Bishop Shanahan's time.
I: What have you heard about Bishop Shanahan?

R: Bishop Shanahan was a great man. Our elders called him *onye ụka na akwukwo*—the man of church and book. He did not only preach; he built schools that taught reading and writing. Those schools gave people dignity and hope.

I: How did these schools change your community?

R: People moved from farming to teaching and office work. Education brought respect. But we also lost part of our culture—our festivals and language started fading.

I: What do you consider his greatest contribution?

R: He opened our eyes through education. Everyone, slave or free, could learn. That was his gift.

Interview 2: Retired Teacher (Onitsha, July 2025)

Interviewer: Please tell us about your background.

Respondent: I am Mrs. Agnes Eze, a retired teacher. I taught in Catholic schools for thirty-five years. My mother was one of the early girls who attended Sacred Heart Convent School in Onitsha during Shanahan's era.

I: What have you learned about his work?

R: He gave attention to women's education. The Sisters under his supervision trained girls to read and write, not just cook and sew. That changed our position in society.
I: What challenges existed then?

R: Many families were poor. Parents sold farm produce to pay school fees, but they saw education as an investment.

I: What do you think remains his legacy?

R: A disciplined system that built morals as well as knowledge. He made education a way to serve God.

Interview 3: Catholic Clergyman (Nsukka, August 2025)

Interviewer: Father, how do you describe Bishop Shanahan's role in Igbo education?
Respondent: Shanahan made education the tool of evangelization. He understood that through schools, the Church could form both the mind and the soul.

I: What is your view about his English-only policy?

R: It opened doors but reduced the place of the Igbo language. If he lived today, he would promote bilingual education to protect our heritage.

I: What can modern educators learn from him?

R: That education without character is empty. Shanahan taught discipline, faith, and service—values we must restore.

Interview 4: Community Elder (Abakaliki, July 2025)

Interviewer: Sir, could you tell us your name and experience with mission education?
Respondent: My name is Elder Ngozi Nwafor, from Abakaliki. I am 78 years old. I did not meet Bishop Shanahan, but I grew up hearing about him from my father. He said the early people feared that the white man's school would make us abandon our ways.

I: What changed that perception?

R: When those who attended the schools began to read and write letters for others, people saw the benefits. Education brought light and respect. Even those who opposed the schools later sent their children.

I: How do you think his work still affects your community today?

R: Most of our leaders and priests came through Catholic education. He gave us the strength to face the modern world.

Interview 5: Catholic Nun (Awka, August 2025)

Interviewer: Sister, what can you say about the influence of Bishop Shanahan on moral education?

Respondent: I am Sister Mary Okonkwo from Awka. I joined the convent in 1985, but the

system we follow began with Bishop Shanahan. The schools did more than teach reading and writing—they shaped character and faith.

I: How did he achieve that?

R: Morning prayers, discipline, and respect were part of learning. Students were taught to be honest and hardworking. That is why many of our leaders today still carry that discipline they learned from mission schools.

I: How would you describe his legacy?

R: He taught us that real education must train both the mind and the soul.

Interview 6: Retired Civil Servant (Enugu, August 2025)

Interviewer: Please introduce yourself and tell us about your experience with mission education.

Respondent: I am Mr. Chukwudi Okorie, 67 years old, from Enugu. I attended a Catholic primary school in the 1960s.

I: How did mission education influence your life?

R: It changed everything. Before the mission schools, our people traded but could not manage accounts. After learning arithmetic, we began to run businesses better. Many of us got jobs in government service because of that education.

I: What is your general opinion of Bishop Shanahan's contribution?

R: He gave our people a ladder to rise. Education became the key to progress. That is why I always tell young people that schooling and faith go hand in hand.

Summary

All six testimonies reveal that Bishop Shanahan's educational mission deeply transformed Igbo society. Respondents agree that his work promoted literacy, discipline, and Christian faith while providing social and economic opportunities. However, they also acknowledge the gradual decline of traditional customs and language that accompanied Western education. Overall, the oral evidence confirms that Bishop Shanahan's legacy in Igboland is both enlightening and transformative, blending faith, knowledge, and culture in lasting ways.