

Introduction of Formal Education in South Sudan (1900 - 1953)

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Article History	Abstract
Original Research Article	<p><i>This paper is about the introduction of formal education in South Sudan (1900 - 1953). Formal education was introduced to the people of South Sudan in the early twentieth century by the Christian Missionary Societies (CMS) with the support of the Anglo-Egyptian Government.</i></p> <p><i>The research design used for this case study had adopted a qualitative approach, which involves the generation of data in quantitative form. This study will be use published and unpublished sources. Therefore, the method used in the process of data analysis for this study is the historical approach.</i></p> <p><i>At the coming of the Christian missionary societies to South Sudan in order to introduce formal education as well as Christianity, there developed conflict of interest between the local population and the incoming European Christian Missionary Societies. Because of the dispute, many ethnic groups in South Sudan resisted the new missionary education because they felt their education system was equally good. Many local chiefs refused to send their children to the mission schools; they felt their children would forget their traditional culture and adopt the European civilization.</i></p> <p>Keywords: formal education, Christian missionary societies, South Sudan, colonial education, historical analysis.</p>
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<p>Copyright © 2026 The Author(s): This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC) which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium for non-commercial use provided the original author and source are credited.</p> <p>Citation: Thaddaeus W. Apollo Wani, Prof. Yosa Wawa & Prof. Daniel Thabo Nyibong. (2026). Introduction of Formal Education in South Sudan (1900-1953). UKR Journal of Education and Literature (UKRJEL), 2(3), 142-145.</p>	

Background

Before the coming of western education system, non-formal education was very common and popular among the communities of South Sudan. It was carried on outside the framework of formal system to provide selected types of learning for particular children and adults. The informal education is a long-life process by which every person acquires and accumulates knowledge, skills, and attitudes from daily experience and exposure to the environment. People learn many important practical things at home such as, digging, cooking and rearing of animals at home. The aim of non-formal education is to prepare the young people for their future life (Nyibong, 2024).

Formal education in South Sudan was introduced after the conquest of 1898, and especially when the colonial powers of both Egypt and Britain signed the condominium agreement in 1899 at Cairo (Arkel, 1955). The coming of the condominium government into power and the appointment of James Currie as the first Director of Education in 1900 marked the beginning of Formal

Education in South Sudan (Beshir, 1969). Thereafter, the government appealed to European Christian missionaries to enter South Sudan to start the education system. Therefore, a group of Italian Roman Catholics, Anglican Missionaries, American Presbyterian and the Verona Fathers were allowed to enter South Sudan (Collins, 1969). Soon after, the missionaries opened up a lot of mission schools in the entire South Sudan for example Wando, Rikita, Babindo, and Iriwo. Further mission schools were also set up in Lui, Yambio, Isoke, Terengure, Lul and Raga. The aim of Christian Missionary Societies is to convert the local inhabitants into Christianity, which is their top priority then stop the spread of Islam into South Sudan. The Missionaries educational objectives had to be always training of students in skills, reading and writing to serve the native administration (Daly, 1986).

Methodology

Generally, methodology is the technique used in the process of data collection for any research work. Therefore, the data

collection method and research instruments that were used during the process of data collection for this study is the qualitative approach. The data includes primary and secondary sources that are obtained from the library, internet and archives (Denscombe, 2007).

For the purpose of this paper, the researcher has gone to the University of Juba library and the internet centre. The researcher has also consulted the National Archives of South Sudan in Munuki at Militia Market. The National Archives is under the Ministry Of Culture, & Information, where he has collected the data.

Formal Education in South Sudan (1900 - 1946)

In politics of educational policies, South Sudan was treated separately from the Northern Sudan during the mentioned period, whereby, education expansion was carried out differently between the two regions. Education in the South Sudan, in the meantime, undergo fundamental changes, in either quantity, quality, or policy.

The educational plan within the period emphasized on consolidation and reorganization, rather than expansion or fundamental changes. Education was to continue under missionary control, and the limited participation by the government was advocated, not on grounds of desirability but as an experiment in areas where the missions had failed to establish schools, such as in the Dinka area, and as an answer to the critics of missionary system who argued that no such experiment had yet been made. Thus, the growth of education in the South compared to the North was very slow during this period. The Roman Catholics, Verona fathers achieved during this period a greater increase in schools of all levels of education compared to other missions. Thus, they established two teachers training centres for village schools in Equatoria in 1946. Consequently, a village school was established in Tonj in Bhar el Ghazal for the Dinka and at Abuong in the Upper Nile Province (Beshir, 1969).

In fact, these missionaries contributed positively in the development of schools and they had played a great role in the foundation of education in South Sudan.

The establishment of the church in South Sudan always went hand in hand with the opening of the schools usually in the same premises. The missionaries founded a number of schools in the entire South Sudan for instance Zaraf, Nagichot, Mbili, Yubu and Ulang. The aim of Christian mission is to convert the inhabitants of South Sudan into Christianity then stop the spread of Islam into the area. The Christian Missionary Society's policy was based on the principle that, if the native wishes to read he/she must first be baptized (Daly, 1986).

South Sudan by then was entrusted to European Missionaries as a result, during this period of development there was a strong cooperation between the government and the missionaries. The government further encouraged the establishment of new missions, and education became the most favoured agent of evangelization. South Sudanese inhabitants were not interested in missionary education; few accepted because they did not know the benefit of education. Many local chiefs refused to send their sons, daughters to the mission schools. Few of them were constantly hostile thinking that their children would forget their culture, norms, values and tradition. In other words, their children would adopt the European civilization.

Indeed, the educational policy of the British was completely left to the Christian missionaries in the twentieth century. Lack of financial constraint was a major factor for leaving the educational sector of the South Sudan to foreign agencies, at least those who can provide schools and teachers without government involvement.

However, it was not lack of funds only; the colonial educational system also was lacking shortages of staff, which resulted to the monopoly of education by the Christian Missionary Societies. Education in South Sudan was of low progress, for example in many villages like Yei Schools were conducted by local teachers in the vernacular. The unqualified Italian teachers were giving further instruction also in English often of the Pidgin type. The Christian Missionary Society's educational policy was governed by the sphere system to avoid further friction between different Christian denominations found in South Sudan under the government supervision (Nyibong, 2024).

The 1946, educational plan did not bring radical changes in Southern Sudan. It laid the foundations for future changes by its existence on consolidation and reorganization. The two-parts of the country remained separated by two different educational systems with different aims, arising from different administrative and political plans (Beshir, 1969).

Formal Education in South Sudan (1947 - 1953)

In the previous era, South Sudan was ruled by dual colonial system known as Anglo-Egyptian Condominium government (1899 - 1956), when Sudan was granted independence by Britain. The last decade of condominium administration was considered as a period of rapid advancement in the field of education. Although education in the South was outside the government term of reference, people witnessed different dimension of educational expansion, unification, and nationalization of educational policies. At the beginning of 1946, a new Southern Policy was initiated to govern the education system. This new policy rejected the idea and practice of separate

development for the North and South. Instead, it advocated a policy, which would gradually bind the South Sudan to the North. The Southern Sudan according to the Policy, would no longer be looking outside Uganda or East Africa nor remain isolated from the North. This implied the encouragement of Arabic and its teaching in Schools, the education of Southerners in the Northern Secondary and Higher Schools, and a more active participation by government in education so that the South could catch up to the North (Bredlid, 2014).

The new policy further stipulated that, the educational system between North and South Sudan should be unified, one curriculum, introduction of Arabic and Islamic culture in the Southern Schools, Arabic teachers are to be deployed into the South and the Nationalization of Missionary and Private Schools. In addition, by 1947, Sudan government unified the educational system, whereas, in 1954 the Ministry of Education took charge of teacher training institute in the South (Ding, 2010).

Discussion

Beshir, (1969) quoted that; formal education was introduced by the Christian Missionary Societies in the South Sudan. However, it was of low value and has very little effect in the life of South Sudanese. While Collins, (1961) explored that, the sphere system has made peace possible among the European missionaries in South Sudan. He added that, it was administratively a brilliant success. I agree with the first author, because he has indicated that, the missionaries' education was of low value and has little effect on Southerners. Consequently, the missionaries were mainly concentrating on religion. That is why the education system was very low with little effect on the grass root level.

I disagree with the second Author, because he has clarified that, the sphere system has created a relative stability among the European Missionaries in South Sudan. In my point of view, the sphere system had caused social differences and friction as well as conflict among the European Missionaries in a foreign land.

The history of education in South Sudan is a very long episode to narrate. Education in this part of the country was under the responsibility of the Christian Missionary Societies (CMS) supervised by the colonial government.

Formal education in South Sudan was by then administered separately depending on the type of missionary society in charge of that particular mission. That is to say, in schools under the catholic missionaries, they do apply restriction, while the protestant missionaries do offer freedom in their schools.

Findings

The findings for this study indicate that: Shilluk and the Bari has accepted the new Education system and the accompanied Christianity. They finally, adopted the incoming European Civilization up to the present moment. Other findings include the positive impact of the Christian Missionary Education on the entire people of South Sudan. Many became educated then employed as government officials, also others became priests like Lodovico, Liquid, and Saturlino Ohure Hilangki who later became politician.

More so, they learned modern farming system from the European Missionary Schools especially in the Upper Nile Province. In addition, South Sudanese benefited from the Missionary Health Schools where some useful medical services was rendered to them (Battle, 1970). They further had the opportunity of learning foreign languages such as Latin and English. For example, in those days, church prayers were being conducted in Latin around 1970s and 80s.

They were further influence by foreign languages such as Latin and English through the Missionary Education. More so, South Sudanese were taught modern cultivation system (farming) which was not there before and this however, transformed their primitive type of doing things especially in the field of Agriculture. Lastly, Missionary Education has brought new ideas and modern concepts to the native of South Sudan; it has transformed social, economic and political life of the common South Sudanese inhabitants up to now.

The missionary educational policies, which were carried in the South Sudan during the specified era, had a serious impact, especially in the field of language. On language policy, the colonial administration decided that, since there was no common language in the South Sudan, English should be the official language. The colonial administrators were against Arabic. It was viewed as language that the northerners would use to dominate the South culturally and politically. The British government wanted to protect the South Sudanese by imposing English as the official language.

The missionaries have intensively contributed positively to the modern transformation of South Sudan and have become a cultural factor in the evolution of South Sudanese people, which cannot be ignored. The condominium administration laid the foundation and developed a modern system of education in South Sudan.

Conclusion

Generally, the Christian Missionaries Societies (CMS) with the help of the Government introduced formal education in the South Sudan. Especially, when the two colonial partners

of both Britain and Egypt signed the condominium agreement in 1899 at Cairo. Thereafter, the government appeal to the European Christian Missionaries to enter South Sudan to start their education system. Therefore, a group of missionaries were allowed to enter South Sudan. Soon after, the missionaries opened up a number of mission schools in the entire South Sudan. The fundamental aim of the Christian Missionary Societies (CMS) was to convert the people of South Sudan into Christianity then preach the Christian gospel and build up the church of Christ. Their priority aim was also to prevent the spread of Islam into the South Sudan. The philosophical concept of the missionaries' education in the South Sudan was that, if the native wish to study, he/she should first receive the sacrament of baptism. Schools were allocated within the church premises for example in big towns. While in the villages, classes were conducted under the shadow trees in vernacular.

The Christian Missionary Educational Policy was governed by the sphere system to avoid further frictions and inconveniences between different European Christian denominations found in the South Sudan.

Its policy and action in the field of education were guided mostly by its immediate requirements. Nonetheless, it had left behind a network of schools and institutions, which the South Sudanese Masters of their own destiny could build on and develop.

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