

A HISTORY OF BRITISH COLONIAL GOVERNMENT INTERVENTION IN GIRLS SECONDARY EDUCATION IN COLONIAL LAGOS, 1927-1960

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Abstract

This paper examines the history of British colonial government intervention in girls' secondary education in Lagos between 1927 and 1960, with particular emphasis on the establishment of Queen's College in 1927 as a turning point. It argues that colonial intervention in female education was neither immediate nor benevolent, but rather a response to sustained agitation by elite Lagos women, particularly through organized associations such as the New Era Club. Prior to this intervention, girls' education was largely neglected by the colonial state and left in the hands of missionary bodies, where it remained limited in scope and shaped by religious instruction and domestic ideals. The study situates the development of girls' education within the broader context of indigenous educational systems, missionary expansion, and colonial policy frameworks. It shows that precolonial systems provided functional, socially integrated training for girls, while missionary education introduced literacy but reinforced Victorian gender norms that confined women largely to domestic roles. Colonial educational policies, particularly the education ordinances and the grant-in-aid system, further institutionalized gender inequality by prioritizing male education for administrative purposes while marginalizing female schooling. Drawing on primary sources from the National Archives, Ibadan, as well as relevant secondary

literature, the paper highlights how petitions and advocacy by elite women placed pressure on the colonial administration to establish a government-funded girls' secondary school. The founding of Queen's College marked the first significant state involvement in female education, expanding access and producing a small but influential class of educated women. However, the paper argues that this intervention was deeply ambivalent. While it created new opportunities for girls, it simultaneously reinforced colonial gender ideologies through a curriculum that emphasized domestic science, morality, and restricted professional pathways such as teaching and nursing. Furthermore, access remained largely limited to elite and middle-class families, thereby entrenching existing social inequalities. Ultimately, the paper concludes that colonial intervention in girls' secondary education in Lagos was both enabling and restrictive. It laid an important foundation for the expansion of female education in Nigeria, while at the same time perpetuating gendered and class-based limitations, reflecting the broader contradictions of colonial governance.

Introduction

By the early twentieth century, access to secondary education in colonial Lagos remained highly unequal along gender lines. While missionary and colonial educational structures had gradually expanded opportunities for boys, girls' education remained limited in scope, curriculum, and institutional support. Formal secondary education for girls was largely absent, forcing many elite families either to rely on mission schools with restricted educational pathways or to send daughters abroad for further schooling. Growing dissatisfaction with this imbalance encouraged elite women's group in Lagos to demand direct government involvement in girls' secondary education. This concern was reflected in

official correspondence transmitted to the Secretary of state for the Colonies regarding petitions submitted by the elite women's organizations in Lagos:

I have the honour to transmit herewith a copy of petition dated the 1st of May 1925, submitted by the members of the New Era Club, 1923, praying that a secondary school for girls, to be styled Queen's College, may be founded by the Government on the lines of King's college for boys. There are at present in Lagos schools for girls, the highest standard at which this school aim is standard VI of the Education code; this represent the highest educational facilities available for girls locally; but from time to time, girls who are daughters of well-to-do parents, are sent to the United Kingdom for secondary education. It is very generally held now-a-days that education of girls should bear a definite relationship to the education of boys; and the Advisory Committee on educational policy in British Tropical African recently observed that "clever boys for whom higher education is expedient must be able to look forward to educated mates."¹

The epigraph above is an extract from a memorandum to the secretary of state for the colonies. These statements highlight important themes on girl child education. It brings to bears the marginalization of the Girl child secondary education in comparison to their male counterparts. It progresses with the motive behind the outcry against the marginalization, which was grooming girls to be at par with male students and becoming educated mates. Within this framework, girls' secondary education occupied a marginal and subordinate position. British colonial ideology was shaped by Victorian gender norms, that viewed women primarily as wives, mother

¹ National Archives Ibadan (NAI) Chief Secretary Office (CSO)/26/2, 14909/vol.1 Establishment of Government School for Girls in Lagos.

and custodian of domestic morality rather than as potential participants in public administration.² This ideology or norm led to the clamour for educated mates for clever boys.

Consequently, colonial officials regarded investment in girls' education as less urgent and less economical. The British 'did not think that the standard of female education available in Nigeria has lagged unduly behind the standard attained by their mates... the demand for secondary education of girls in Nigeria exist, although it cannot be said to be urgent, as to the call for immediate action on the part of this government.

This agitation against the marginalization of girls' secondary education was for the provision of a Government Girls secondary school in Lagos by elite Lagos women association such as the New Era Ladies Club. Lagos by in 1861 was formally annexed, by 1869 it has become a British colonial possession and administrative hub. The city's strategic coastal location, thriving commercial activity, and a long-standing engagement with the Atlantic trade made it an ideal base for British imperial Interests in the Bight of Benin. Lagos functioned not merely as a port but as a political, economic and cultural hub from which British authority radiated into the Yoruba hinterland and later into the wider territories that became southern Nigeria.³ Administratively, Lagos served as the seat of colonial governance, hosting the governor, colonial secretariat, courts, and other bureaucratic institutions that embodied British imperial authority.

British officials regarded Lagos as a laboratory of colonial policy where social, legal and educational experiments could be tested before wider application.⁴ The colony's cosmopolitan

² Burton, A. (1994). *Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women, and Imperial Culture*. Chapel Hill: UNC Press. p.47.

³ Hopkins, A.G. (1973). *An Economic History of West Africa*. London: Longman. p.125.

⁴ Falola, T. (1999). *The History of Nigeria*. Westport: Greenwood Press. p.72.

population- comprising of Europeans, returnee ex-slaves (Saro and Amaro communities), missionaries, traders and indigenous elites created a unique social environment in which Western education assumed particular importance.⁵ As such, educational policy in Lagos was deeply intertwined with the practical needs of governance than egalitarian ideals.

While carrying out this research to provide answers to the questions, this paper relies on a body of both primary colonial records generated from the National Archives in Ibadan for its analysis and secondary sources were consulted. It relied on books like *History of Education* by A. Babs Fafunwa; Fafunwa work provide a comprehensive historical overview of Nigeria education from pre-colonial times to the post-independence period. The book is highly detailed on policy frameworks, ordinances, and government initiatives, making it valuable for understanding the institutional context of girls, education in Lagos. Another reviewed book is *Making Modern Girls* by Abosede George. George focuses specifically on girls, experiences and agency in Lagos under colonial rule. She examines missionary schools, elite women's petitions and the creation of Queen's College. Emphasizing social and cultural dimensions of education. *Women in Government Service in colonial Nigeria, 1862-1945* by LaRay Denzer; Denzer's work situates female education within the broader context of women's participation in colonial government and professional life. She documents link between state-supported education and female employment. *Slavery and the Birth of an African City* by Kristin Mann; Mann provides the historical backdrop of Lagos as a colonial city, showing how social hierarchies, trade, and urbanization created conditions for the eventual development of formal education. Toyin Falola - *The History of Nigeria*, offers a broad overview of Nigerian history,

⁵ Mann, K. (2007). *Slavery and the Birth of an African City: Lagos, 1760-1900*. Bloomington: Indiana University press. pp.213-214.

including education under colonial rule. He examines policy development, the grant-in -aid system and gendered implications of schooling.

The central thesis of this discourse is that the British colonial government intervened in girls' secondary education after women elite groups in Lagos agitated against the limited intervention of the colonial government in girls' secondary education. This intervention brought about the establishment of Queens College in 1927, as the first major government sponsored girls' secondary school, which represented both a critical step toward educational opportunity for women and a mechanism for reinforcing colonial gender ideologies.

Historical Background To Western Styled Girls' Education

Before the advent of Western-style education in the mid-nineteenth century, girls' education in Lagos was rooted in indigenous systems of knowledge transmission, which were informal, community-based, and deeply integrated into everyday social life. These systems reflected Yoruba cultural values and social organization, emphasizing character formation, economic competence, moral discipline, and preparation for womanhood, rather than literacy in the Western sense. In precolonial Lagos, girls learned through observation, imitation, and active participation in domestic and community activities.⁶

A central component of girl's indigenous education was domestic training. Girls were taught food processing, cooking, childcare, cleaning and household management. Moral education accompanied practical instruction, stressing values such as obedience, respect for elders, sexual propriety, patience and industry. Contrary to colonial assumption that pre-colonial African societies neglected female education, girls

⁶ Ajayi Ade, J.F. (1965). *Christian Missions in Nigeria, 1841-1851*. London: Longman. p.5.

in Lagos received extensive training in markets and artisanal production. Girls apprenticed informally under mothers or other female relatives in occupations such as trading, weaving, dyeing, food vending and pottery.⁷ This economic education equipped women with relative financial autonomy and social influence within the household and community. Markets women, in particular occupied powerful positions in Lagos society and girl's early exposure to come aid activities prepared them for active roles in local and regional trade networks.

While indigenous education was comprehensive within its cultural context, it did not emphasize formal literacy, numeracy or abstract academic instruction. Colonial officials and missionaries often interpreted this absence as educational backwardness.⁸ This misinterpretation later justified missionary and colonial claim that African girls needed "civilizing" education. The transition from indigenous to missionary education therefore represented not merely an expansion of new learning opportunities but a restricting of gendered knowledge.⁹

Missionary Entry And Early Girls School In Lagos

Education in Lagos had an historical turn with the advent of the first English speaking Christian mission in Badagry in September 1842. The arrival of Reverend Thomas Birch Freeman of the Methodist Mission and other mission societies such as Church Missionary Society (CMS), Baptist Church and

⁷ Mann, K. (2007). *Slavery and the Birth of an African City: Lagos, 1760-1900*. Bloomington: Indiana University press. p.95

⁸ Fafunwa, A.B. (1974). *History of Education in Nigeria*. Routledge Revivals: Taylor & Francis Group. p.16.

⁹ Falola, T. (2001). *Culture and Customs of Nigeria*. Westport: Greenwood Press. p.109.

the Roman Catholic Church set the stage for the development of Western education in the country.¹⁰

The first known school was established in 1842 at Badagry by Mr. and Mrs. De Graft and was named the “Nursery of the Infant Church.” Although the Methodists are often credited with early educational initiatives, the CMS formally arrived in Badagry in January 1845 aboard an American vessel, the *Adarae*. The CMS subsequently established a mission station and two schools in Badagry. Their primary objective was the evangelization of Africans through education, with emphasis on literacy, Bible knowledge, hymn singing, catechism, and basic communication skills in reading and writing..¹¹

Education took a dramatic turn with the introduction of secondary school by missionaries. From 1842 to 1859, only primary schools were established. Primary education was needed to make the “native” governable and make them easy vessels for the impartation of Christian belief and ethos, secondary education soon proved to be critical to further consolidate and expand colonial rule. It was also needed to serve as veritable base for training civil servants who would be able to take over from European expatriates.¹² The first secondary school in Lagos and Nigeria was CMS Grammar School for boys. By 1878, the Methodist Boy’s High School was established. What followed was unprecedented, the Methodist established the Methodist Girl’s High school in Lagos. More secondary schools for boys were established in Lagos and around Nigeria; Baptist Academy 1885, Hope

¹⁰ Fafunwa, A.B. (1974). *History of Education in Nigeria*. Routledge Revivals: Taylor & Francis Group. p.82.

¹¹ Fafunwa, A.B. (1974). *History of Education in Nigeria*. Routledge Revivals: Taylor & Francis Group. p.88.

¹² Ogunyemi, A.O. (2015). A Historical Reconstruction of the Colonial Government’s Education Expenditure in Nigeria and the Place of the Girl-Child 1940-1957. *Historical Research Letter*, vol. 27. ISSN 2224-3178. p.22.

Waddel Training Institute, Calabar, St Andrew's College in Oyo. School for girls were very limited in Lagos and around Nigeria as Lagos had just one girl secondary school and Ibadan had St. Anne in 1896. Only these schools catered for girls' secondary education. This marginalization created a social imbalance well into the 20th century.

By 1909, the British colonial government established a Government Boy's secondary School as their intervention towards increasing literacy among male children, which was the King's College. Many would have thought that this development would be extended to the girl education but that was not the case. This meant one thing that women were not seen as the gender that should take over from European expatriate or should be trained as civil servants. The girl secondary school available was not sufficient to cater for the bulk of female children interested in secondary education.

Secondary schools founded in Lagos up to 1909

Name of school	Date	Gender
CMS Grammar School.	1859	Boys
Methodist Boys High School.	1878	Boys
Methodist Girls High School	1879	Girls
Baptist Academy	1885	boys
Kings College	1909	Boys

Across all missionary denominations literacy for girls was closely tied to religious objectives. Girls were taught to read the bible, hymns and catechisms introduced as secondary as secondary skills. Literacy was not valued for economic or political participation but as a means of moral refinement and religious conformity.¹³ Missionaries promoted the concept of

¹³ George, A. (2014). *Making Modern Girls: A History of Girlhood, Labor, and Social Development in Colonial Lagos*. Athens: Ohio University Press. p.40.

Christian womanhood and blended it with the Victorian gender idea. Girls were expected to embody virtues such as humility, chastity, obedience, and industriousness. Education was thus a civilizing project aimed at reshaping African femininity to align western Christian norms.¹⁴ While missionary education undeniably expanded access to formal schooling for girls in Lagos, it also imposed restrictive gender ideologies that limited women's educational and social horizons. These missionary frameworks later influenced colonial education policy particularly the government's cautious and gendered approach to girls' secondary education in the early twentieth century.¹⁵

British Colonial Educational Policy and Gender

British colonial education policy in Nigeria was not gender neutral. From its legal frameworks to its funding mechanisms, colonial policy systemically privileged male education while marginalizing female schooling. This bias is vivid in the education ordinances enacted by colonial authorities and in the grant-in-aid system, which translated gender ideology into administrative and financial practice.

The earliest colonial education ordinance in Nigeria, particularly those of 1882, 1887, and 1916 designed primarily to regulate missionary schools rather than to expand access to education.¹⁶ These ordinances focused on inspection, curriculum control, teacher certification and discipline. Crucially, they were framed around the needs of the colonial administration, which prioritized the training of boys for clerical and technical roles.

¹⁴ Burton, A. (1994). *Burdens of History*. p.50.

¹⁵ George, A. *Making Modern Girls*. P. 55.

¹⁶ Fafunwa, A.B. (1974). *History of Education in Nigeria*.p.74.

Female education was either absent or vaguely defined in these ordinances. Where girls were mentioned, it was usually in relation to moral instruction and domestic training rather than academic or professional development. This omission was not accidental, it reflected colonial assumptions that women's role lay outside public administrator and the formal economy. By failing to mandate or actively promote girls' education. Education ordinances institutionalized gender inequality. The law itself reinforced the idea that female education was optional and supplementary, not a core component of colonial development.

The objectives underpinning education ordinances were explicitly gendered. Colonial officials viewed education to produce clerks and interpreters, artisans and technicians, subordinate administrative staff. Since these roles were reserved for men. Policy framework implicitly excluded women.¹⁷ Girl's education was justified only insofar as it contributed to domestic efficiency, Christian morality, and social stability. This ideological bias ensured that even when education expanded, girls remained at the margins of policy concern.

The Grant-in-aid was the most influential mechanism through which colonial government-shaped education, introduced in the late 19th century, provided financial assistance to schools that met government standards.¹⁸ While presented as a neutral funding policy, the system operated in ways that clearly disadvantaged formal education. Schools that received the largest and most consistent grants were those that offered academic curricula, prepared students for clerical and administrative work, enrolled predominantly male students. Girl's secondary schools by contrast, were typically

¹⁷ Falola, T. *History of Nigeria*. p.88.

¹⁸ Fafunwa, A.B. (1974). *History of Education in Nigeria*. p. 104.

smaller, less well equipped, and focused on domestic subjects such as needlework, hygiene, and childcare. Colonial officials regarded these schools as less deserving of public funds.¹⁹

As a result, grant-in-aid reinforced gender bias by channeling resources toward boys' education while leaving girls' school underfunded and dependent on missionary charity.²⁰ Most of the expenditure went into financing boys' only schools to the almost neglect of the girl-child as most of the then existing secondary schools... were boys only schools with the exception of Methodist Girls High School and Anglican Girls Grammar School in Lagos.²¹

This table illustrates the enrolment of boys and girls in Lagos secondary school in 1920's. It depicts a picture of why girls' secondary schools were under funded in terms of enrolment.

Denomin ation	Number of schools	Enrolment Boys	Enrolment Girls	Total	Attendance Boys	Attendance Girls	Total
Anglican	14	545	153	698	397	115	512
RCM	3	376	25	401	320	16	336
Wesleyan	12	446	95	541	363	76	439

Education annual reports.²²

The Turning Point: Pressure for Government Intervention And Government Initiate Response

I have the honour to transmit, herewith, a copy of a petition dated the 1st of May 1925, submitted by the members of the New Era Club, praying that a secondary school for girls, to be styled Queen's college, may be founded by the government on the lines of King's college for

¹⁹ Ogunyemi, A.O. (2015). A Historical Reconstruction of the Colonial Government's Education Expenditure in Nigeria and the Place of the Girl-Child 1940-1957. p.25.

²⁰ Ibid., p.25.

²¹ Ogunyemi, A.O. (2015). A Historical Reconstruction of the Colonial Government's Education Expenditure in Nigeria and the Place of the Girl-Child 1940-1957. p.25.

²² National Archives Ibadan (NAI) Education Annual Report, 09229.

*boys. I should explain that the New Era Club is a club, of some five-year standing, consisting of African ladies' resident in the town of Lagos. Of which lady Clifford, who is a signatory to the petition, was president.*²³

This above memo was written in September 1925 from the right Honorable, L.C.M.S Amery, secretary of state for the colonies. Elite women in Lagos under the umbrella of New Era Club began demanding for government intervention in girls' secondary education. The marginalization of Girls secondary education became obvious and disturbing as it caused social imbalance.

Girls' secondary education was left entirely under the auspices of one or another of the leading mission schools. These represented the highest educational facilities available for girls locally, but from time-to-time girls, who are the daughters of well-to-do parents are sent to the United Kingdom for secondary school.²⁴

The emergence of government intervention in girls' secondary education in colonial Lagos was not simply the result of British benevolence. It was significantly shaped by Lagos elite women, women associations and organized petition that challenged colonial neglect of female education. These women, many who were educated, Christian and economically active, used petition, public discourse and social networks to pressure colonial government to assume responsibility for girls' secondary schooling.

Petitions were the most important means through which Lagos women engaged the colonial state. Women's group submitted formal petitions to colonial governors, education department and advisory boards, calling for government

²³ National Archives Ibadan (NAI) Chief Secretary Office (CSO)/26/2, 14909/vol.1 Establishment of Government School for Girls in Lagos.

²⁴ Ibid.

intervention in girls' secondary education.²⁵ These petitions typically demanded; the establishment of government funded girls' secondary schools, improved funding for existing girls' schools and education parity between boys and girls. The clamour by elite Lagos women was the education of girls should bear a definite relationship to the education of boys and that clever boys for whom higher education must be able to look forward to educated mates.²⁶

This advocacy and petition for government intervention in girls' secondary education was followed by immediate response from the government. The colonial government refused to understand that "the education of girls should advance *pari passu* with the education of boys, and that whatever standard may be achieved by the boys of a country, a similar standard- no more and no less- should be available for the girls. In Lagos, the locally educated girls who reaches standard VI should be educationally suitable mate for the best product of kings college... similarly, the very limited number of girls who are fortunate enough to go to the united kingdom for secondary education should be sufficiently qualified, from a purely educational stand point, for matrimony with the limited number of boys who go to the united kingdom for legal and medical training.²⁷ The response of the government was that they do not that the standard of female education available in Nigeria has lagged unduly behind the standard attained by their mates.²⁸ The government agreed that the demand for a secondary education in Nigeria existed but disagreed on the urgency for immediate action and saw the establishment of Queen's college as an expensive solution.²⁹

²⁵ Denzer, L. (1987). *Women in Government Service in Colonial Nigeria, 1862-1945*. Ibadan: Heinemann. p.26.

²⁶ NAI (CSO)/26/2, 14909/vol.1 Establishment of Government School for Girls in Lagos.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

To this effect, various alternative suggestions were made to supplant the establishment of a government secondary school for girls. One such suggestion was that funds might be made available by government to enable one of the five existing mission schools for girls in Lagos to extend their curricula beyond standard VI. Another suggestion was to allow for mixed classes at Kings College for girls as happened on the Gold Coast. Lastly, a proposition to make a modest start with secondary education for girls by engaging a well-qualified school mistress who could impart secondary education to a few carefully selected girls. On this modest beginning the foundation of Queens College will be laid.³⁰

British colonial government was concerned about investing into Girls secondary education. They feared that education might become a curse than a blessing to a woman. That higher education might make girls discontented with their roles as wives and mothers. It might undermine family life and domesticity of a woman. This fear led to the conclusion that a teacher whose values are hinged on family life must be employed to inculcate and impart girls with such values.

*Education is a curse rather than a blessing if it makes women discontented or incompetent. But the real difficulty lies in imparting any kind of education which has not a disintegrating and unsettling effect upon the country. The hope of grappling with this difficulty lies in the personality and outlook of the teacher.*³¹

Queen's College, Lagos (1927): The First Major State Intervention

The establishment of Queen's College, Lagos, in 1927 marked a turning point in the history of girls' education in colonial

³⁰ NAI (CSO)/26/2, 14909/vol.1 Establishment of Government School for Girls in Lagos.

³¹ NAI (CSO)/26/2, 14909/vol.1 Establishment of Government School for Girls in Lagos.

Nigeria. it represented the first significant and direct intervention by the British colonial government in female secondary education, breaking with its long-standing reliance on missionary provision. The establishment of Queen's College was seen as raising the standard of education for girls in Lagos. It was to become a model for the existing girl's schools. It was to set the standard of attainment for existing girls' schools with a view to laying a sound foundation for secondary education and its extension. The Queens college was to be a "mutatis mutandis" of the same standard and characters as are those of the Kings college.³² For these goals to become achievable the British colonial government gave its full intervention into this project. It intervened in funding, provision of building, repair and maintenance, employment and curriculum.

British colonial government were every interested and concerned about the sort of principal, teachers and assistant teachers that were to be employed. In fact, this was the most important aspect of the establishment of the school.

*A well qualified school- mistress who could impact secondary education to a few carefully selected girls. The first task would be study the education of girls as it at present exists in Lagos, with a view to forming opinion with regard to the more pressing necessities.*³³

Under-qualified staff were not selected. Government got recommendations to employ staff. For instance, Mrs Leith Ross name was put up for consideration as Mrs Stuart Will was not "available for the position of Lady superintendent. She was considered a well educated woman who is fully capable of tackling the question of the secondary education of girls here".

³² NAI (CSO)/26/2, 14909/vol.II Establishment of Government School for Girls in Lagos.

³³ NAI (CSO)/26/2, 14909/ vol. II Establishment of Government School for Girls in Lagos.

In view of the great importance of obtaining a suitable candidate for this responsible work, the government also intervened in proposing salary structures for staff. Salary structure scale was between £480 to £600 per annum. This careful selection brought in Miss Wordsworth as the first principal, an educationalist possessing the highest qualifications. The government deemed it necessary as they were establishing precedents and making sure it's the right one.³⁴

Government intervention also came in provision of school buildings, staff quarters and girls' hostels. The Hussey Charity building that housed the Marine department was designated as the Queens College building during its early years. Several alterations and maintenance were made. A building for domestic science was erected which cost £360 to build and acquire stores, sinks, lighting, and furniture for teaching domestic science inclusive of lavatory and latrine. While the principal was provided accommodation at N0.3 force rd. the construction of the girl's hostel was not immediate. It was proposed 6th June 1928 by the principal since many applicants come from places outside Lagos. Also, many Lagos parents wanted their children to be boarders, and the housewifery curriculum could be more effective if girls were boarders. She proposed a small house system that would be attached to the house where she lived at 3 Force Road, which should be one with the house mistress house and it should consist of a dormitory and a sitting room to provide accommodation for about 15 girls.³⁵

Another form of colonial government intervention came in form of curriculum development and planning. Queens

³⁴ NAI (CSO)/26/2, 14909/ vol. II Establishment of Government School for Girls in Lagos.

³⁵ NAI (CSO)/26/2, 14909/ vol. II Establishment of Government School for Girls in Lagos.

College provided for the higher education of girls from fourteen years upward, with special regard to home craft and the care of children. Apart from ordinary subject like mathematics and English, attention was given to the following: Literature, history, especially social history and geography, hygiene in the home, cookery with special reference to food values, children's diet, the preserving of fruit and vegetable, needle work and home gardening. Outside lectures were games, singing, and rhythmic exercises. This kind of curriculum emphasized and showcased that "the chief aim of the college will be to fit girls to become cultured women, practical housewives and wise mothers"³⁶ for educated men and training women to be as employed as trained female teachers and nurses nothing more.

Furthermore, the payment of school fees was decided by the colonial government. It was fixed to be £9 per annum in respect of each girl attending the college, extra charge being made for book, writing and needle work materials. This fee was agreed and authorized upon after careful deliberation on how much mission school and Kings' college charged. This £9 per annum was opted for because it would be a mistake to place the fee at a figure so high as to be beyond the means or inclination of the parents of the girls, whom it is desired to attract. The government did not also consider that a higher fee should be charged for a girl at the new college and that any charge regarding the former beyond £9 must be accompanied by a corresponding increase in respect of Kings College.³⁷

³⁶ NAI (CSO)/26/2, 14909/ vol. II Establishment of Government School for Girls in Lagos.

³⁷ NAI (CSO)/26/2, 14909/ vol. II Establishment of Government School for Girls in Lagos.

Name of school	School fees
Kings College.	£9 per annum
CMS Girl's seminary, standard V, VI and secondary.	£6 per annum
Wesleyan Girl's High School.	£5.41 per annum
Catholic Mission Secondary, school.	£4.4 per annum

Lastly, the colonial government authorized the education department, Lagos, to oversee admission application of pupils, as no entrance examination was written and admission was left to the discretion of the principal. This admission application was published in newspapers. Queens college admitted twenty female students on October 10, 1927. From this period to 1960, Queens College remained the only government secondary school for girls in Lagos.

Impacts of Government Intervention in Girls' Secondary Education in Colonial Lagos

Government intervention in girls' secondary education in colonial Lagos, though late and limited, had far-reaching social, cultural, and political consequences. Beginning most visibly with the establishment of Queen's College, Lagos, in 1927, state involvement marked the shift on exclusive reliance on missionary education to a more direct, though cautious, colonial commitment to female education. The impacts of this intervention were complex, combining expansion of opportunity with the reinforcement of class and gender hierarchies.

One of the most immediate impacts of government was the creation of formal secondary-level opportunities for girls in Lagos and around Nigeria. Before, the 1920's girls' education rarely extended beyond elementary schooling and very few missions established girls' secondary school that could cater

for only limited girls with limited curriculum. The establishment of Queen's College provided the first sustained pathway for girls to obtain secondary education comparable though not equal to that available to boys.

Government intervention contributed to the emergence of a small but influential educated female elite in Lagos. Graduates of Queen's college and similar institution became teachers and nurses forming the nucleus of professional African women in the colonial city. This group gained social prestige and economic independence, challenging traditional gender norms that confined women largely to domestic roles. However, this transformation was uneven, benefitting mainly girls from elite or middle-class families who could afford school fees and meet admission requirements.

Government intervention reduced the exclusive dominance of missionary societies in girls' secondary education. Through direct ownership of schools and regulation via grants-in-aid, the colonial state exerted greater control over curriculum, discipline, and educational objectives. This shift ensured that girls' education aligned more closely with colonial administrative needs rather than purely religious goals. However, reliance on mission persisted, limiting the depth of state responsibility.

Another major impact of government intervention was the shaping of a gender-specific curriculum. While girls received academic intrusion, considerable emphasis was placed on domestic science, hygiene, and moral training. This curriculum reflected colonial ideology that viewed women primarily as wives, mothers, and caregivers. Consequently, girls' secondary education prepared students for a narrow range of occupations, especially teaching and nursing, rather than leadership or technical professions. Government intervention thus expanded education while simultaneously restricting its transformative potential.

Conclusion

The establishment of Queen's College, Lagos, in 1927 marked a significant milestone in the development of girls' secondary education in colonial Nigeria. It represented the first major intervention by the colonial government in formal female education, thereby challenging the earlier dominance of missionary institutions in this sector. The school expanded access to secondary education for girls and contributed to the emergence of an educated female elite, many of whom later became influential in teaching, nursing, and social reform activities. However, the institution also reflected the limitations of colonial educational policy. Its curriculum reinforced prevailing gender norms by combining academic instruction with domestic training, while its elitist structure restricted access largely to girls from urban and privileged backgrounds. In addition, Queen's College functioned within the broader objectives of colonial governance, promoting Western cultural values, discipline, and loyalty to the colonial state, thereby revealing the dual role of education as both empowerment and social control. Overall, the impact of Queen's College was both progressive and restrictive. It laid an important foundation for the expansion of girls' education in Nigeria and provided role models for future generations of women, yet it also reproduced class and gender inequalities embedded in colonial society. Its legacy is therefore ambivalent, reflecting both the advancement of female education and the ideological constraints of colonial rule.

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