

## The role of the catholic church in enhancing secondary school education: an analysis of facilities, student enrollment and performances in gboko catholic diocese, Benue State, Nigeria

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### Abstract

This study examines the role of the Catholic Church in enhancing secondary school education in Gboko Catholic Diocese, Benue State, Nigeria. The research focuses on three key areas: facilities availability, student enrolment trends and performances in External examinations. Using both qualitative and quantitative methods, data were collected from Catholic secondary schools within the Diocese to assess their contributions to educational development. Findings reveal that enrolment trends from 2012 to 2023 reveals fluctuating patterns, with schools such as St. Thomas De Apostle, Uga, and St. Lucy, Awajir, experiencing a decline while others, such as Notre Dame Mkar and St. Peters Uchagh, show steady growth in enrolment. Findings also review excellent performance in external examination from the schools. Interviews with school principals confirm that inadequate facilities, and poor management of personnel and learners contribute to decline in enrolment trends. The study recommends targeted investment in infrastructure, improved funding, and strategic policy interventions to bridge the resource gap and enhance educational outcomes in Catholic secondary schools within the Diocese.

**Keywords:** Catholic Church; Secondary Education; Facilities; Student Enrolment and Gboko Diocese

### 1. Introduction

Education is an integral part of the life of the Church and a fundamental instrument for individual and societal development. Thus, the provision of quality and holistic education for the average child irrespective of religious or ethnic differences is the primary goal of Catholic Church. This combines intellectual, physical, moral, spiritual and cultural formation that is premised on Christian religious principles and the social teachings of the Church. Therefore, Catholic educators are those who share in the mission of the church to teach, educate and build the virtue of the children through moral education which, not only builds the person but also, helps to make society a better place (Ndille, 2020).

This concept has been used by various studies to denote the act of the Church providing education through facilities, human resources and even finances. It also implies that the Church is actively ensuring that education is provided to all. Studies have shown the disposition of the Church in the provision of education from the 'Great Commission' of Christ to the apostles referenced in Matthew 28:19 which states: "go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" The Code of Canon Law [Canon 794, (1)] is clear on why the Church should be involved in education. It says; "the Church has, in a special way, the duty and the right of educating, for it has a divine mission of helping all people to arrive at the fullness of Christian life. Thus, pastors of souls have a very grave obligation of making all possible arrangements so that the faithful may avail themselves of a Christian education [canon. 794, (2)]. They must ensure that this education is enjoyed by all the faithful and especially the young ones who are the hope of the church".

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The provision of quality education is highlighted in the code of Canon Law, (Canon., 795) that, “education must pay regard to the formation of the whole person, so that all may attain their eternal destiny and at the same time promote the common good of the society.

Therefore, in the context of Catholic philosophy, education is a Christian journey toward perfection to which everyone is called by faith in Christ. It is preparing those being educated for everlasting life. The nature of Catholic education should therefore contain fundamental Christian principles that constantly critique the present reality in the light of God's word. As such, it constitutes an important part of the Catholic Church Ministry (Saaondo, 2021). Religious institutions, particularly the Catholic Church, have played a crucial role in promoting secondary school education in Nigeria. In Gboko Catholic Diocese, Benue State, the Church has established several secondary schools that contribute to educational growth.

Despite global efforts to improve quality in education, public, private and even faith based secondary schools in Nigeria continue to face significant challenges. The Catholic Church emphasizes a holistic approach to education, combining academic excellence with moral and personal development, as outlined in Canon 795 of the Code of Canon Law. However, most schools in Nigeria suffer from poor infrastructure, inadequate staffing, lack of learning resources, overcrowded classrooms, and poor implementation of government educational policies, leading many parents to seek alternatives. While private and faith-based schools appear to provide better facilities, they sometimes lack proper regulation and oversight, affecting educational standards. Given these concerns, this study examines the role of the Catholic Church in addressing educational challenges in secondary schools within Gboko Diocese, Benue State. Specifically, it analyzes the state of infrastructure, staff strength, and student enrolment in Catholic-owned schools. The objectives are;

- Examine the infrastructural facilities available in these schools.
- Ascertain the volume of student enrolment and graduation rates.
- analyse the performances in their external examinations (WAEC/NECO)

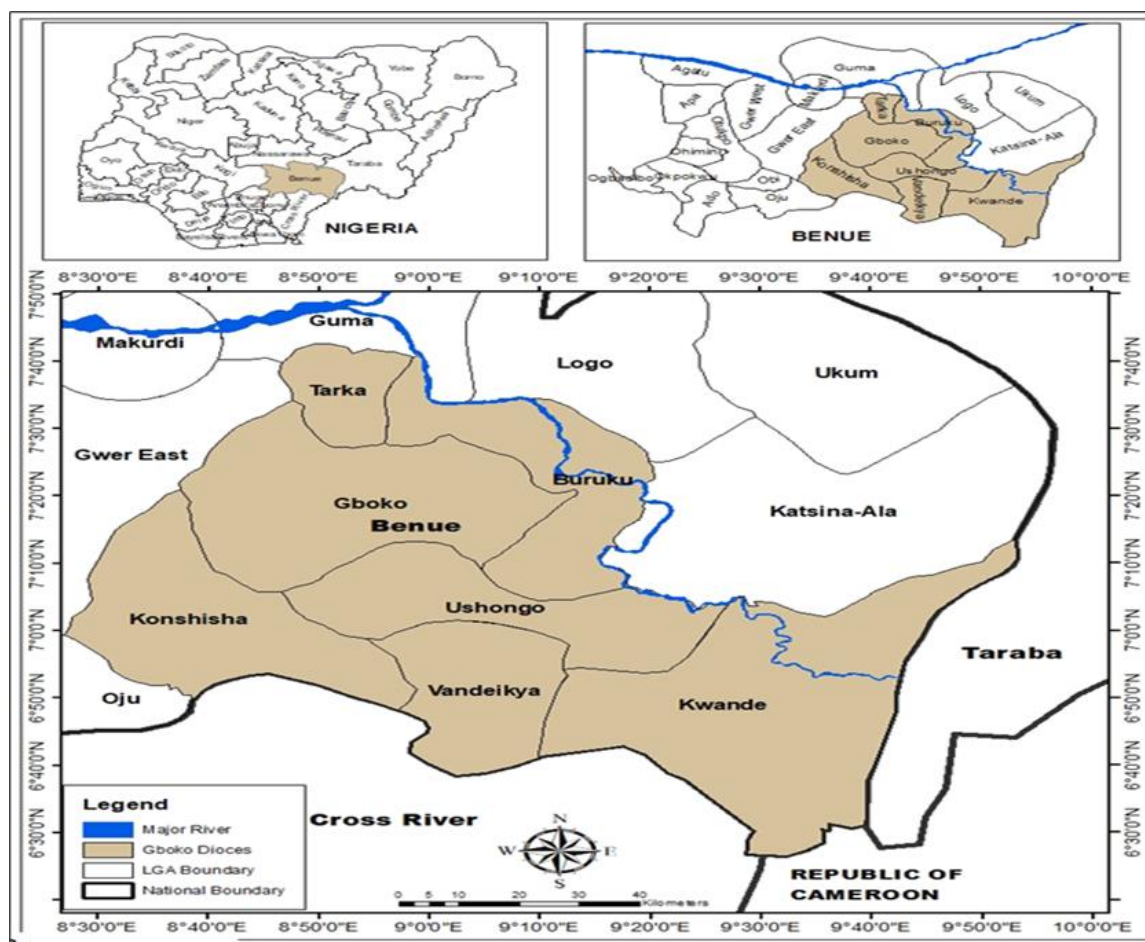
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## 2. Material and methods

### 2.1. The Study Area

The Catholic Diocese of Gboko is a Roman Catholic Diocese whose headquarters is located in Gboko town, Benue State, and it is administered under the Ecclesiastical province of Abuja in Nigeria. The Diocese was created on the 29<sup>th</sup> December 2012 by Pope Benedict XVI. The Diocese is headed by His Lordship, Most Revd William Amove Avenya. It stretches between latitude 6° 10' to 7 40' North and longitude 8° 30' to 10° East. The constituent local governments include Gboko, Konshisha, Vandeikya, Ushongo, Kwande, Tarka and Buruku Local Government Areas. The Catholic Diocese of Gboko has an area of 10,692 square kilometres, with a total population of 2.252.388 out of which 1.521,550 are Catholics (Directory, Catholic Diocese of Gboko, 2024). There are twelve (12) Deaneries, fifty (50) Parishes, forty-four (44) Rectories and eight (8) Chaplaincies in the Diocese. Gboko Diocese has a population of 11,793 students within the 42 schools located across their parishes, (Catholic Education Services of Gboko, 2024). The map of Gboko Diocese is shown in figure 1.

This study adopts a field survey design to assess the contributions of the Catholic Church to secondary school education in Gboko Diocese. The study population includes 42 Catholic secondary schools across 12 Deaneries, with 11,793 students, alongside school administrators, teachers, and parents. Secondary data were obtained from Gboko Catholic Education Services, school records, and archival documents. Primary data were collected through interviews with 12 school principals, 36 teachers, and the Catholic Education Secretary, as well as observations of infrastructure and school facilities. A cluster sampling method was used to select one school in a Deanery, resulting to 12 for the study. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages), with results presented in tables, charts, and graphs. Inferential analysis was used for student enrolment trends.



Source: GIS Laboratory, Benue State University, Makurdi (2024).

**Figure 1** Gboko Catholic Diocese

### 3. Results and discussion

#### 3.1. Facilities Available in Catholic Secondary Schools in Gboko Diocese

The Catholic Church has invested in infrastructure, including; classrooms, science laboratories, libraries, ICT centres, and sports facilities. While some have well-equipped facilities, others require additional investments to meet modern educational standards. Facilities availability are presented in Table 1.

The data in table 1 shown above included details on student population, classrooms, desks, writing boards, electricity, fans, water supply, laboratories, computers, library desks, sporting activities, refectories, and sick bays. The total student population across these schools is 2,908, with 69 classes, suggesting an average of approximately 42 students per class. This ratio is indicative of moderately populated classrooms, though individual schools like Notre Dame Girls Secondary School, Mkar, exceed this average significantly, implying possible overcrowding. One may ask why it is so. It is as a result of the pressure to accommodate more students as per the quality of the school in terms of standard infrastructure and quality learning. The total number of desks in classrooms is 225, with each class averaging approximately 3-4 desks, raising concerns about inadequate seating arrangements in some schools.

Out of 12 schools, only 4 have functional laboratories for Physics, Chemistry, and Biology. Notre Dame Girls Secondary School, Mkar, for instance has 15 desks in the Chemistry lab and 5 each in the Physics and Biology labs. This is because of her deliberate need for science learning in her school. And the implication is obvious; the learners are exposed to wholesome education, wherein they have options to either go the way of Arts or Sciences making a choice for a professional career in the future; be it in engineering, medicine, ICT or even civil law as they so desire. In contrast, schools like St Peter, Uchagh, Transfiguration Secondary School, Kyado and St Lucy, Awajir completely lacked science laboratories, limiting practical learning. This has consequences too. They are rural schools with limited funding that are

constrained by underdevelopment both in terms of physical structures and learning. They learners would have limited options to learn as in making a choice for proficiency in future professional careers. For this, Yusuf and Yusuf (2009), opined, the absence of practical science resources is a significant barrier to effective science education in Nigerian secondary schools. This harmonized with the data that showed only few schools had functional laboratories or computers, which are critical for science and technology education.

**Table 1** Availability of facilities in schools

Name of school	Number of students	No. of classes	No. of Desk in a class (arms)	No. of Writing board	No. of classes with electricity	Fans in classes	No. of taps or wells	No. of Laboratories	Physics laboratory	Chemistry laboratory	Bio laboratory	No. of computers in lab	No. of desk in Library	No. of sporting activities	Refectory	Sick bay	Total
Iyol I Kristu Secondary School, Abwa	170	6	17	12	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	3	1	0	0	0	43
St. Patrick Sec. School, Use-Ushongo	355	6	12	12	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	2	8	3	0	0	45
St. John Bosco Secondary School, Zege	154	6	22	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	2	3	2	0	0	40
St. Lucy Secondary School, Awajir	221	6	16	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	27
Notre Dame Girls Sec. School, Mkar	551	6	45	23	23	46	4	5	5	5	15	100	42	4	1	2	326
St. Peter Secondary School, Uchagh	154	6	13	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	25
St. Gregory Secondary School, Gbem	210	5	20	6	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	36
St. Thomas De Apostle Secondary School, Uga	298	6	20	6	0	0	0	2	3	3	3	0	0	3	0	0	46
Holy Innocent Secondary School, Ikpo- Ikpo	251	5	23	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	39
Transfiguration Secondary School, Ikyado	178	5	12	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	24
St. Christopher Special Science School, Annune	188	6	25	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	1	0	1	42
St. Thomas Model College Gboko	178	6	0	24	3	3	1	2	4	0	4	4	4	1	0	0	56
Total	2908	69	225	113	26	49	8	16	13	9	23	114	58	22	1	3	749

Source: Researchers field work, 2024.

The total number of desks in libraries is 114, spread across 58 computers in labs, primarily concentrated in Notre Dame Girls Secondary School, Mkar (42 computers). This highlights significant disparities in ICT resource distribution.

Sporting activities are available in 22 instances across the schools, a relatively low number given the total student population. This could affect the holistic development of students.

Facilities like electricity, fans, water supply, refectories, and sick bays are deficient or unevenly distributed. For instance, only 49 classes have electricity, primarily at Notre Dame Girls Secondary School, Mkar, which also leads in terms of fans (46) and water supply (5 wells/taps). Egbokhare (2013), had this to say about such: infrastructural deficits are among the primary challenges that rural schools face, limiting their ability to provide quality education.



**Figure 2** Notre Dame school block and interior of class room

The significant disparities in the availability of facilities among these schools made manifest the broader trends of educational inequality in Nigeria. Research by Adedeji and Olaniyan (2011) disclosed how secondary schools established in rural areas are often under-resourced compared to their urban counterparts, leading to a lower quality of education and student outcomes. This was evident in the data, where schools in rural locations had fewer desks, no electricity, and inadequate laboratory facilities. Olumide et al. (2012) emphasized the importance of school health services in promoting students' well-being and academic success. The lack of which facilities in most schools listed suggests a gap in that area.

Interview with Principals, staff, and some parents affirm that unavailability of electricity, laboratories, refectory, sickbay and poor furnishing of infrastructure are major issues affecting smooth learning in their various institutions. Evidence of poor infrastructure in some of the schools are shown in figure 2 - 4.



**Figure 3** Staff room and Principal's Office combined at Transfiguration Kyado

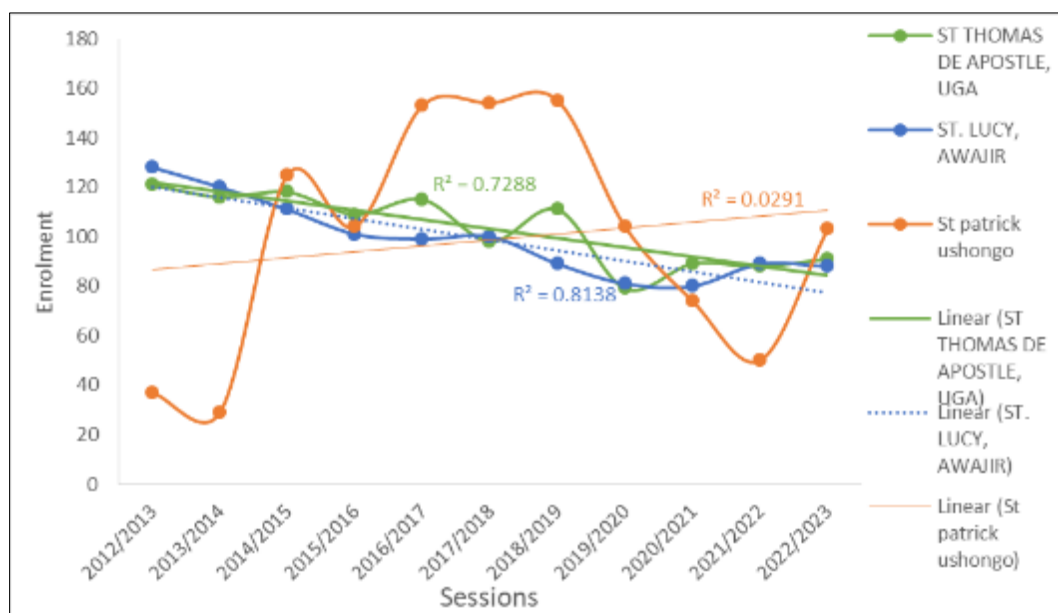




**Figure 4** Multipurpose laboratory at St Thomas College Gboko South

### 3.2. Students Enrolment and Graduation Rates

Student's enrolment is the total number of students admitted in each academic year in a school. The number of students admitted in each school per year is shown in figure 5 to 5

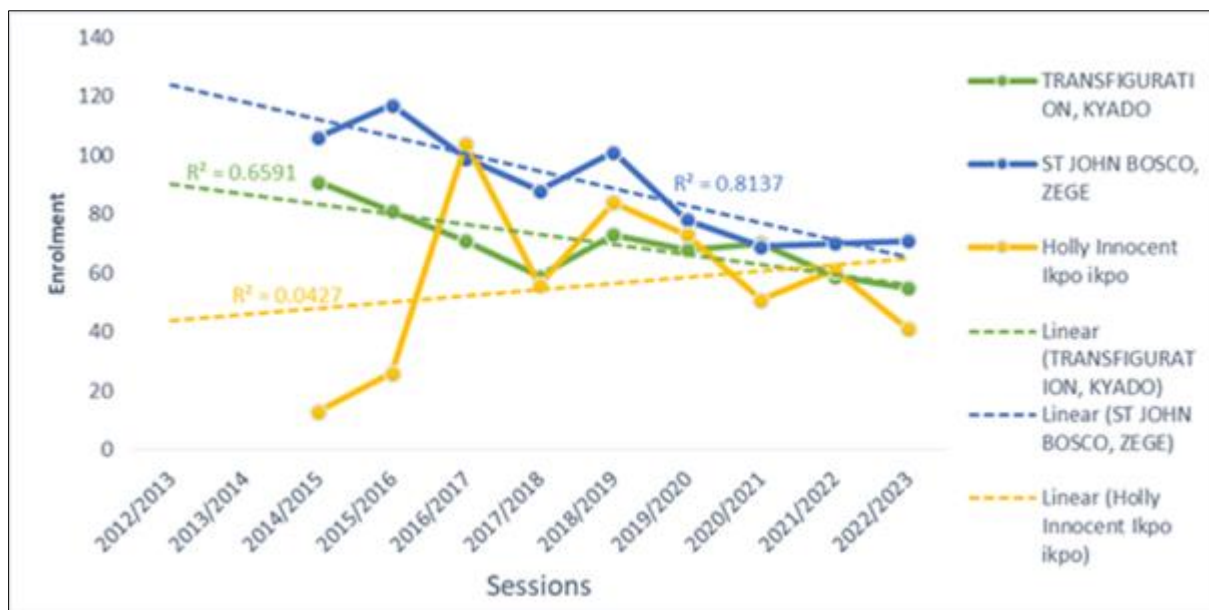


Source: Authour's Analysis, 2024

**Figure 5** Trend of enrolment at St. Thomas De Apostle Uga, St. Lucy Awajir and St. Patrick Ushongo

The trend of enrolment in schools as shown in figure 5 across three secondary schools; St. Thomas De Apostle, Uga; St. Lucy, Awajir; and St. Patrick, Ushongo from 2012/2013 to 2022/2023 sessions showed that St. Thomas De Apostle, Uga enrolment fluctuates but generally decreases over the years. This trend is supported by a negative slope in the linear regression line with  $R^2=0.7288$ , which indicates that 73% of the enrolment variation is explained by this trend. St. Lucy, Awajir; the enrolment shows a gradual decline. The linear regression trend line confirms this pattern, with  $R^2=0.8138$  suggesting a high level of reliability in this downward trend. St. Patrick, Ushongo; enrolment starts very low, peaks dramatically in the mid-period (around 2017/2018), and then declines. Its regression trend line shows a slight positive slope, but the  $R^2=0.0291$  indicates a very weak relationship, implying the trend is inconsistent. St. Patrick Ushongo, data is highly irregular. The sharp rise and fall in enrolment point to specific events, such as: a change in school leadership, deficient structural development, increase in tuition fees, and competition among neighbouring schools. St. Thomas De Apostle, Uga and St. Lucy Awajir exhibit significant decline in enrolment, which is linked to several factors as; population shifts, competition from other schools, economic challenges, poor staffing, poor infrastructural facilities, and low standards of learning. The general decline agrees with the submission of Ajayi & Ilesanmi (2019) who examines

irregular enrolment trends in rural secondary schools in Nigeria, linking anomalies to changes in school management, infrastructure upgrades, and localized government policies. Declining enrolment aligns with broader findings in sub-Saharan Africa, where rural schools face diminishing enrolments due to urban migration and competition from urban-based institutions (UNESCO, 2018).



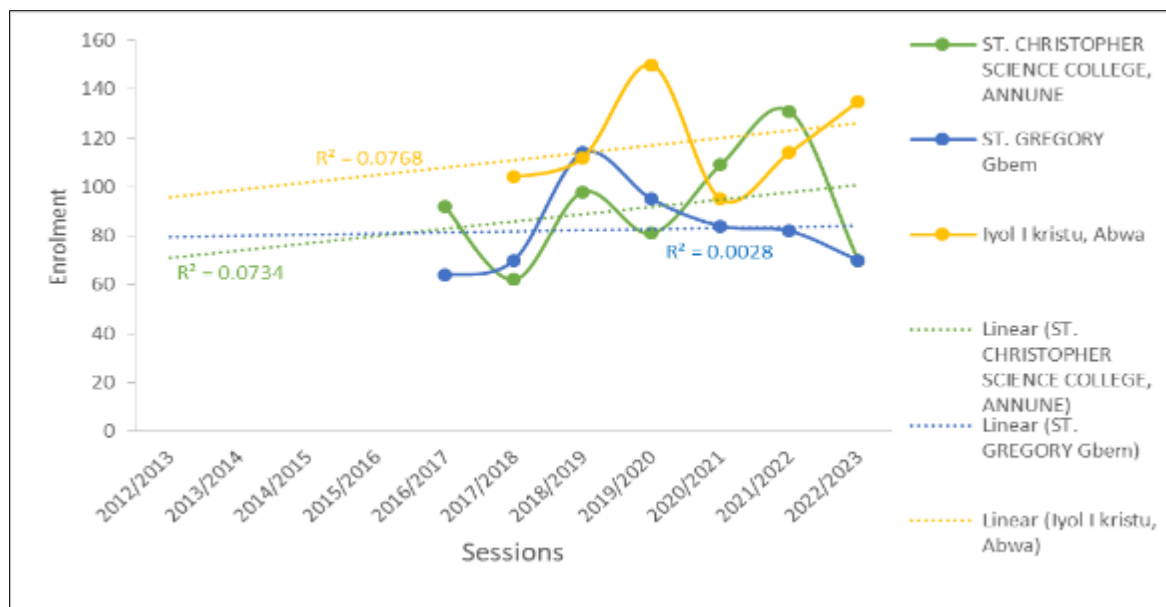
Source: Authour's Analysis, 2024

**Figure 6** Trend of enrolment at Transfiguration Kyado, St. John Bosco Zege and Holy Innocent Ikpo Ikpo

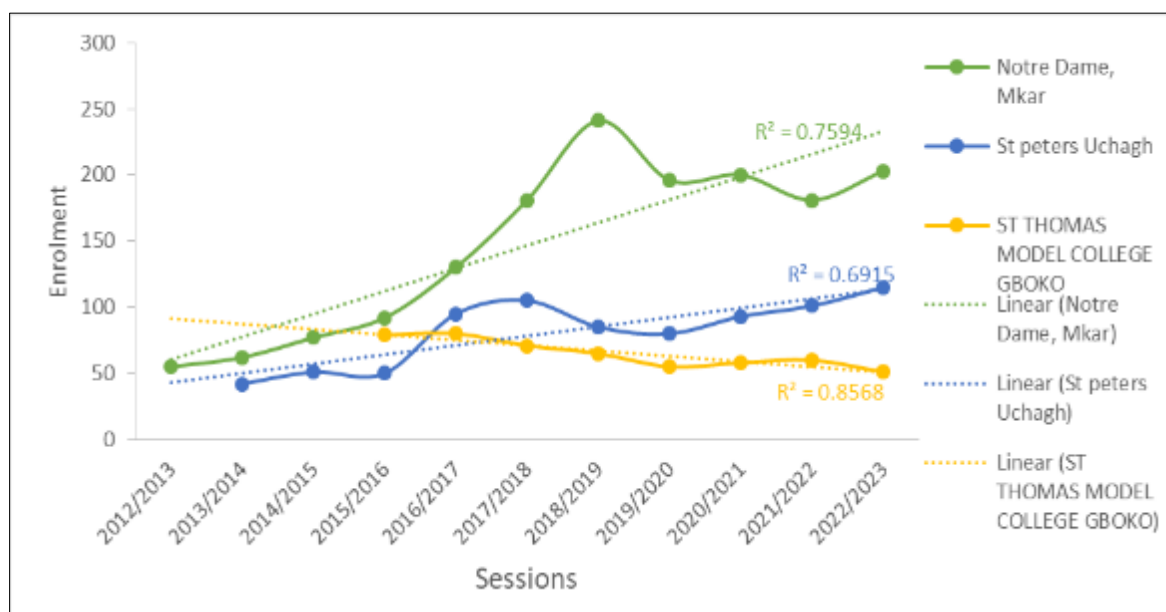
In figure 6, the enrolment has steadily declined across the years from 2014 to 2023 at St. John Bosco Zege with an  $R^2$  value of 0.8137, the trend line indicates a very strong and consistent negative trend. This suggests that factors causing the decline have been persistent over time, such as population shifts, competition from other schools, poor management, and poor infrastructural facilities and staffing. Interview with the principal revealed that poor infrastructure, poor staffing, and poor examination grades at both national and international examination, increment in school fees and the establishment of private schools within the vicinity had drastically contributed to the drop in enrolment.

Similar to St. John Bosco, Transfiguration Kyado too showed a gradual decline in student's enrolment. The  $R^2$  value of 0.6591 demonstrates a strong correlation between the trend line and actual data points, signifying a consistent downward trend over the years. Here too, the reasons aren't farfetched; Lack of infrastructural facilities, qualified and motivated staff, poor management of personnel and learners, increment in tuition and lack of motivation to go to school suffices as reasons for the downsize in enrolment.

Enrolment at Holy Innocent Ikpo -Ikpo is more erratic. There is a noticeable spike around 2016/2017 academic session, followed by a sharp decline and fluctuating numbers thereafter. The low  $R^2$  value of 0.0427 indicates that the trend line poorly fits the data, reflecting the inconsistent nature of enrolment at in the school. When the principal was interviewed, he remarked: that the school started with a block thereby limiting the number of admissions, and as time progressed, infrastructure was improved upon and enrolment increased. Consequently, Power tussle on who to be the helmsman caused the decline in enrolment, as the one not chosen for the job led a campaign of calumny against the school. Poor staffing and remuneration made other staff leave the school. Of course, poor infrastructure and conducive environment to learning. All these contributed to the rise and fall in enrolment in the school.



Source: Authour's Analysis, 2024

**Figure 7** Trend of enrolment at St. Christopher Science College, Annune, St. Gregory Gbem and Iyol I Kristu, Abwa

Source: Authour's Analysis, 2024

**Figure 8** Trend of enrolment at Notre Dame, Mkar, St. Peters Uchagh and St. Thomas Model College, Gboko

The trend of enrolment for three schools; St. Christopher Science College, Annune, St. Gregory Gbem, and Iyol I Kristu, Abwa across academic sessions from 2012/2013 to 2022/2023 as presented in figure 7 showed that, at St. Christopher Science College, Annune, the enrolment exhibits fluctuations but generally showed a slight upward trend over the sessions. The trend line has a low  $R^2=0.0734$ , indicating weak correlation and minimal consistency in growth. This pattern stemmed from inconsistent academic performance, competition among sister schools, change in headship and administrative policy of "no to examination malpractice" that forced other students leave for "miracle centres" wherein they could be given examination answers on board and of course, increment in tuition are some of the reasons for the nosedive in enrolment in some sessions. St. Gregory Gbem, the enrolment trend appears fairly stable with slight fluctuations. The trend line is relatively flat, and the  $R^2=0.0028$  suggests almost no significant relationship between time and enrolment changes. Stability in enrolment implied a steady reputation but limited efforts to increase enrolment through marketing and infrastructure improvements.



At Iyol I Kristu, Abwa the Enrolment has experienced more significant fluctuations compared to the other schools. After a peak around the 2018/2019 session, there was a decline, followed by a rebound. The  $R^2=0.0768$  suggests a stronger correlation than the other schools. Variability is attributed to external factors such as changes in educational policies, infrastructural upgrades, disciplined teaching and learning, good management of teachers and learners and targeted enrolment campaigns as disclosed by an informant.

The trend of enrolment, data for three schools: Notre Dame, Mkar, St. Peters Uchagh and St. Thomas Model College Gboko, across academic sessions from 2012/2013 to 2022/2023 as shown in figure 8. The enrolment in Notre Dame, Mkar shows significant growth up to 2018/2019, peaking at over 250 students. However, there was a slight decline afterward, stabilizing at around 200 students in recent sessions. The linear trend line has an  $R^2=0.7594$  indicating moderate correlation. Despite some fluctuations, there is a general upward trend over the years. The increase reflected enhanced academic performance, improved reputation, and infrastructural upgrades. The stabilization in recent years suggests the school has reached its enrolment capacity and needed no additional students. An interview with the Vice Principal academics confirmed that, as a result of same sex based female school that is well secured, its strategic geographical location, good record in both internal and external examination, laurels won in extracurricular activities both within and outside of the Diocese, good infrastructure and discipline; both of teachers and learners, parents are motivated to send their children for learning.

Enrolment at St. Peters Uchagh grows steadily over time, especially from 2016/2017 onward, showing consistent improvement in numbers. The  $R^2 =0.6915$  indicates a strong positive correlation between enrolment and time, suggesting deliberate efforts by the school to increase enrolment through campaigns, reputation, or academic results. The steady growth resulted from strategic initiatives to attract students, perhaps through improved academic outcomes, affordability, and enhanced facilities.

Enrolment at St. Thomas Model College Gboko appears relatively flat, with minor fluctuations and little growth over the years. The trend line shows a slight decline. The  $R^2 =0.8568$  is very high, indicating a strong correlation and a slightly downward linear trend. This suggests that the school had struggled to maintain and grow its student base. The stagnation stemmed from competition among neighbouring schools, declining academic reputation, lack of sufficient infrastructure, and demographic factors.

In the Interview with some informants across the 12 schools selected for investigation, the respondents were quick to observe, that most of what had been highlighted as reasons for the high and low in enrolment in almost all the schools are truly reasons for the fluctuations or relative stability registered across the sessions; which are: poor infrastructure, poor staff strength with no incentives, poor academic outcomes, fierce competition among neighbouring schools, campaign of calumny by laid off staff, increment in tuition in some schools and change in headship and administrative policies. However, parents with modest means look out for cheap schools they can afford. The Catholic Education Secretary of Gboko Diocese outlined some achievements recorded in educational system such as the training and retraining of teachers through seminars and workshops, the establishment of more schools. He further stated the challenges faced in secondary school education system in the Diocese, comprising; inadequate infrastructural facilities, poor remuneration of teachers, insufficient qualified teachers, frequent resignation of teachers, and arbitrary taxation from the Government among other challenges. He further proffered possible solutions to the challenges as in training and re-training of teachers, to recruit more qualified teachers and improve their welfare.

The performances of schools that participate in external examination are presented in Table 2 and 3. From the schools investigated, not all are accredited to have WAEC and NECO examination centre.

Data presented in Table 2 illustrates that the candidates in their schools had excellently performed well in WAEC. Out of the twelve schools investigated only four schools had WAEC accredited centres. Candidates with five credits and above including English and mathematics were considered to have passed. From the years investigated, all the schools registered have good records of pass. In Notre Dame, for the year, 2022, 70 students registered for the examination and the examination was cancelled. This was as a result of suspicion of examination malpractice as made known by the principal. From the results presented, it is obvious that, the schools are contributing significantly to the academic growth of students.

**Table 2** Performances in WAEC examination from 2019 to 2023

Years	2019		2020		2021		2022		2023	
Name of School	No registered	No. with 5 credits above	No registered	No. with 5 credits above	No registered	No. with 5 credits above	No registered	No. with 5 credits above	No registered	No. with 5 credits above
Notre Dame Girls Sec. School, Mkar	54	54	53	49	55	53	70	C	101	96
St. Patrick Secondary school, Ushongo	33	33	24	22	25	24	25	21	32	29
St. Thomas De Apostle Secondary School, Uga	42	42	41	40	40	38	35	32	30	29
St.Thomas Model College, Gboko	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	30	30

Source: Researcher's Field Work, (2024).

**Table 3** Performances in NECO examination from 2019 to 2023

Years	2019		2020		2021		2022		2023	
Name of School	No registered	No. with 5 credits above	No registered	No. with 5 credits above	No registered	No. with 5 credits above	No registered	No. with 5 credits above	No registered	No. with 5 credits above
Notre Dame Girls Sec. School, Mkar	44	44	45	45	52	49	72	69	99	95
St. Patrick Secondary school, Ushongo	30	28	18	18	20	19	11	10	0	0
St. Thomas De Apostle Secondary School, Uga	35	35	39	37	40	39	43	41	45	42
St.Thomas Model College, Gboko	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	20	20
St. Lucy Secondary School Awajir	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	21	20
St. Gregory Secondary School Gbem	0	0	0	0	0	0	26	20	27	16

Source: Researcher's Field Work, (2024).

Data presented in Table 3 showcased that the candidates in their schools performed well in NECO, from the years investigated. Out of the twelve schools investigated only six schools had NECO accredited centres. What is considered passed here are only those with five credits and above including English Language and Mathematics. Most registered students passed in the years under study. The schools with high pass rates include: Notre Dame, Mkar, St. Patrick secondary school, Ushongo, St. Thomas de Apostle, Uga, St. Thomas Model college, Gboko and St. Lucy Awajir . It was not the case at St. Gregory, Gbem. In 2022, 26 students registered for the examination, 20 passed and 6 failed. In the same school in 2023, 27 students registered, 16 passed and, 11 failed. St. Patrick Secondary School, Use-Ushongo maintained a consistent pass rate among those registered, but the number of registered students for the examination varied widely. For example, 30 students registered and passed in 2019, but the number dropped significantly to 11 in 2022 and then to 0 in 2023. This fluctuation was due to varying student enrolment and shifts in academic focus. The excellent performance in the external examination enabled the candidates to proceed to higher institutions where they would be useful to themselves and the society.

#### 4. Conclusion

The Catholic Diocese of Gboko plays a crucial role in the educational landscape of the region, offering a range of secondary schools that cater for different needs of her communities. While some schools, in urban areas, benefit from better infrastructure and resources, many schools in rural areas face significant challenges, including inadequate facilities, high teacher-student ratios, and decline in enrolment due to financial and other constraints. The disparity in resources and performances both at internal and external examination highlight the need for targeted interventions to ensure that all students within the Diocese have access to quality education.

#### *Recommendations*

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made to enhance the educational development of secondary schools in Gboko Catholic Diocese.

- The Diocese should prioritize the improvement of infrastructure in schools, particularly by providing basic amenities such as standardized classrooms, libraries, electricity, ICT centres, water, and well-equipped laboratories.
- To counter declining enrolment due to financial barriers, the Diocese could step up scholarship programs or offer tuition subsidies for students from low-income families. This would help make education more accessible to a broader population

#### Compliance with ethical standards

#### *Disclosure of conflict of interest*

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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