Contributions of Sr. Rita Shisala Itebete to the development of girl-child education: A case study of Sacred Heart Mukumu Girls High School, Kakamega County, Kenya, 1970–2003

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ABSTRACT

The paper has explored the role of Sister Rita Shisala Itebete in the achievement of girl-child education at Sacred Heart Mukumu Girls High School (SHMGHS) in Kenya in Kakamega County, 1970-2003. Sr. Rita, who was a product of the missionary education, the first African principal of SHMGHS, was at the forefront of the promotion of academic excellence, moral development, leadership opportunities among girls during her leadership. Three objectives were used in the study; to trace the educational background of Sr. Rita, to review her contribution towards the growth of girl-child education, and to evaluate overall implications of her leadership within the school and the surrounding community. The study rested upon the Great Man Theory, a theory of history which relies on the impact of exceptional figures in the development of history, and the Ecology Metaphor, which considers schools to be ecosystems, made up of teachers, students, leaders, and the community at large. These theoretical lenses aided in offering a framework in which individual leadership skills of Sr. Rita and the organizational climate that sustained her works were interpreted. The design applied was an historical study design, which is founded on the oral interview of the family members, clergy, teachers, former students and members of the sisterhood, and archival documents of the Kenya National Archives. Secondary materials used were also books and other scholarly materials. Internal and external critique and corroboration and triangulations of the data were done to ensure reliability and validity. Findings indicated that Sr. Rita leadership had transformed SHMGHS into an educational, ethical center where alumni contributed independently and contributed to the educational, medical and other aspects of life. Her legacy shows how the visionary leadership and collaboration with the community influence the rise in access to education among girls and the empowerment of future generations. The study recommends the increased recognition of women leaders in the education sector and increased coverage on the Sisters of Mary of Kakamega who had brought a collective transformation on the area of female education in Western Kenya and other parts of the world.

Keywords: Ecology Metaphor, Girl-Child Education, Sacred Heart Mukumu Girls High School, Sr. Rita Shisala Itebete,Great Man Theory

I. INTRODUCTION

Education as a social, cultural and economic change pillar has been long acknowledged. The introduction of Western education was intricately connected with the coming of Christian missionaries in Europe and America in Africa as they accompanied evangelization with schooling (Sifuna & Otiende, 1992).In Kenya, missionary education left an indelible mark, creating opportunities while also reflecting denominational and colonial priorities. Formal schooling provided Africans with literacy, numeracy, and vocational skills, but it was also a tool for religious conversion and social control (Barasa, 2013; Sifuna et al., 2006).The spread of formal education in Kenya followed the trajectories of exploration, trade, and missionary settlement. Portuguese explorers were the first Europeans to establish contact along the coast in the fifteenth century, but it was the Church Missionary Society (CMS) of London that spearheaded sustained missionary work in East Africa in the mid-nineteenth century. Pioneers such as Dr. Ludwig Krapf and Johannes Rebmann established mission stations at Rabai in the 1840s, introducing both Christianity and schooling to freed slaves and local communities (Bogonko, 1992; Otiende et al., 1992). From these beginnings, missionary education expanded inland with the construction of the Kenya–Uganda railway (1895–1901), which facilitated greater penetration into central and western Kenya (Bogonko, 1992). By 1910, mission stations and schools had spread widely, with the CMS, Friends African Mission (FAM), Seventh-Day Adventists (SDA), and Mill Hill Missionaries (MHM) among the key players (Bogonko, 1992).

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Missionary education was not merely academic. It was vocational and moral, designed to train catechists, evangelists, and workers to serve both the church and the colonial economy (Phelps-Stokes Commission, 1924–1925). Yet it also created new pathways for Africans to access leadership and professional roles. Importantly, the education of girls, though initially neglected, gained attention through the work of Catholic and Protestant missionary sisters who established schools specifically for them. In western Kenya, the Ursuline Sisters of Bergen, Holland, founded Sacred Heart Mukumu Girls High School (SHMGHS) in 1959 with the explicit goal of expanding opportunities for girls in Kakamega County and the surrounding regions (Mulievi, 1993; Amutabi et al., 2024). SHMGHS quickly became one of the leading institutions for girls in western Kenya, benefiting from strong missionary sponsorship and discipline. Until the late 1970s, it was led primarily by expatriate sisters. However, the Africanization policy of the Ministry of Education, which sought to replace expatriates with African educators, ushered in a new era of leadership in mission schools (Amutabi et al., 2024). It was in this context that Sr. Rita Shisala Itebete, a member of the Sisters of Mary of Kakamega and an alumna of SHMGHS, was appointed principal in 1978. Having first joined the school as a Christian Religious Education (CRE) teacher in 1970, Sr. Rita rose to become the institution's first African principal, a role she held until 2003.

Her tenure was transformative. Sr. Rita's leadership coincided with a period of educational reform and expansion in Kenya, during which access for girls improved significantly but challenges of retention, equity, and leadership remained. Sr. Rita was among the few African women in charge of a major Catholic girls school and her work represented the roles of African women in education in postcolonial Kenya, where scholarship had often focused on missionary organizations rather than the African women educated within those institutions (Amutabi et al., 2024; Mulievi, 1993). SHMGHS emerged as an example of academic and holistic centred under her watch, with its alumni becoming key players in the education system, health and politics as well as in civil society. This paper looks at her works in the past thirty years based on three aims, which include tracking her education history, assessing her works and contributions on girls and children education at SHMGHS, and examining changes on the broader population through the influence of her leadership. The study emphasizes how faith, gender, and education intersect by recording her story introducing her to the context of the larger discussion about women in Kenya who led church-sponsored schools.

Two theoretical frameworks underpin the research and are complementary in nature. The Great Man Theory that was advanced by Carlyle (1841) supports the significance of the individuals that are exceptional and whose natural disposition enables them to create history. In this context, it refers to Sr. Rita as a leader who had a vision, discipline and strong will that enabled her to transform SHMGHS during a very critical period of transition. The theory has been criticized due to its underestimation of the significance of social structures, but it nonetheless can be used to find out the role of individual agency in bringing about change in the institutions. At the same time, the Ecology Metaphor by Weaver-Hightower (2008) offers a system-sensitive perspective of education, in which artifacts, relationships, structures, and procedures are involved and constitute education as an ecosystem. This framework allows us to not only see the leadership qualities of Sr. Rita but also to understand how she collaborated with teachers, parents, students, and religious networks to establish the context within which learning and holistic formation would have occurred. A synthesis between these theories permits a more informative mental evaluation of individual leadership and institutional mechanisms. The importance of this study is that it has been applied in contribution to numerous disciplines. Firstly, it further develops the history of education in Kenya by documenting the efforts of a female leader in one of the catholic girls' schools- an area where few records exist. Second, it provides the reflections of the women leadership in faith-based education exemplifying how the work of Sr. Rita conformed to the greater direction of providing girls with authority in academic and moral intuition. Third, it offers practical lessons to education stakeholders like policy makers, religious groups and school administrators as it exposes them to the nature of vision based, disciplined and community-based leadership. Finally, but not the least, it provides a biographical case study that can pioneer the way to renewing researches concerning the Sisters of Mary of Kakamega and their collective efforts in creating girl-child education in the western region of Kenya.

The study is based on the historical approach, using both primary and secondary sources (Sifuna, 1995; Best & Kahn, 1993; Travers, 1978). Archival studies, particularly the Kenya National Archives, represented how oral interviews with relatives, clergy, teachers, alumni, and colleagues were supplemented. Participants were identified using purposive and snowball techniques, and triangulation and corroboration underpinned the validity of the data (Best & Kahn, 1993; Travers, 1978). Oral testimonies are potentially biased and selective, but cross validation with archival and documentary evidence contributed to better reliability.The scope of the study spans 1970 to 2003. The year 1970 marks Sr. Rita's entry into SHMGHS as a teacher, while 2003 marks her retirement as principal. This thirty-three-year period captures her full cycle of influence, from classroom teaching to school leadership. Geographically, the study focuses on SHMGHS in Kakamega County, but its implications extend across Kenya, given the national and regional prominence of the institution and its alumni.In summary, this study seeks to illuminate the contributions of Sr. Rita Shisala Itebete to the development of girl-child education in Sacred Heart Mukumu Girls High School. It argues

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that her leadership transformed the institution into a model of academic excellence and holistic formation, demonstrating how faith-based education, when combined with visionary leadership, can empower marginalized groups. By applying both Great Man Theory and Ecology Metaphor, the study underscores that individual leadership, when embedded in supportive institutional and community networks, can leave a lasting legacy in education.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Studies have examined the contributions of missionary organizations to the development of education in Kenya (Burgman, 1990; Otiende et al., 1992; Mulievi, 1993). However, little or no study have been done on the contributions of the products of missionary education to the rise of education in Kenya as most studies focus on missionary organizations, not on products of missionary education. This study made an attempt of filling the gap by examining the contributions of Sr Rita Shisala Itebete to the development of girl child education in SHMGHS. Several studies have also been done concerning various individuals who have been the former students of Sacred Heart Mukumu Girls High School under the leadership of Sr Rita Shisala Itebete and have been prominent in various parts of Western Region throughout the country and beyond the country. This was therefore the gap that the researcher sought to fulfill by examining the contributions that Sr Rita made while at Sacred Heart Mukumu Girls High School that led to the success of the girls during her time as the principal in the school. Whereas, biographical studies have been presented, there is no detailed study about Sr Rita Shisala Itebete especially in connection with education and leadership. Sr Rita Shisala Itebete being the case of the study has been scantly mentioned in scholarly work which was the main theme of this study.Despite increased access to education for girls, leadership by African women in church-run schools remains underexplored, and detailed biographical studies of individual women leaders remain limited (Amutabi et al., 2024).

1.2 Research Objective

To analyze how Sr. Rita Shisala Itebete contributed to the progress of girl-child education in Sacred Heart Mukumu Girls High School in Kakamega County, Kenya, 1970-2003.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Framework

Two complementary theories were used to guide this study: the Great Man Theory proposed by Carlyle (1841) and the Ecology Metaphor proposed by Weaver-Hightower (2008).

2.1.1The Great Man Theory

The Great Man Theory underlines that there are people who are born with special personal qualities and skills that make them inclined to leadership (Carlyle, 1841). These leaders possess a vision, courage and strength that help them inspire others and shape institutions. The theory has been applied in the field of education where the great persons use their leadership potential to transform schools and communities. Sr. Rita Shisala Itebete exemplifies such a perception, and through her instinctive leadership, moral faith, and vision, she was at a position to steer Sacred Heart Mukumu Girls High School into greatness. This prism reveals her personal qualities and character, which led to the creation of girl-child education.

2.1.2 The Ecology Metaphor

Ecology Metaphor (Weaver-Hightower, 2008) provides a broader view of the investigation of working of educational institutions as complex systems. It is concerned with how actors (students, teachers, administrators, parents), structures (policies, classrooms, curricula), environments (social, cultural, religious settings) and change processes interact. This model can be useful in contextualizing the leadership of Sr. Rita because she did not only affect the students directly but also altered policies, promoted teacher-parent collaboration, and organizational mobilization in the community. Through the two theories, it is the combination that has allowed the interaction of the study with the personal power of the transformational leader, Sr. Rita as well as the systemic factors that interacted with her to enable the education of girls and children.

2.2 Empirical Review

The role played by the missionary groups in providing the foundations of formal learning has been long recognized in scholarship about education in Kenya. Burgman (1990), Sifuna (1990), and Otiende et al. (1992) emphasize the role that missionaries played in evangelism and education and the establishment of schools where individuals became literate, learned vocational skills, and were morally educated. The works of Wasike et al., (2021) and Khanani (2015) on Western Kenya demonstrate how Western Kenya schools like Butere Girls High School and

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Kibabii Secondary School were transformed into a center of academic and spiritual growth with the support of missionaries.However, while the institutional role of missions is well documented, fewer studies have explored the products of missionary education who themselves became agents of transformation. Amutabi et al. (2024) emphasize that African women educated in mission schools often emerged as leaders who redefined intellectual and social spaces in Kenya. Similarly, Namatsi (2010) underscores the influence of Friends African Mission schools in empowering girls to challenge traditional gender roles. Yet, detailed case studies of individual women leaders remain scarce.

The history of Sacred Heart Mukumu Girls High School itself has been addressed in works such as Mulievi (1993), which outlines the Catholic Church's contribution to education in Kakamega. Nonetheless, the pivotal role played by Sr. Rita Shisala Itebete as the first African principal of the school has received little attention in academic literature. While studies acknowledge the prominence of SHMGHS alumnae in various sectors, they seldom connect this success to the leadership strategies, policies, and values introduced by Sr. Rita.Therefore, this study contributes to closing the gap by providing a biographical and institutional analysis of Sr. Rita's contributions to girl-child education. It situates her work within the broader trajectory of missionary education while also recognizing her as an individual leader whose agency and vision significantly shaped outcomes for thousands of girls in Western Kenya.

III. METHODOLOGY

The research design used in this study was historical research design, which was suitable since the research was aimed at exploring the past and its contribution to education of girl-children. Historical investigation enabled the rewriting of the contributions of Sr. Rita Shisala Itebete to Sacred Heart Mukumu Girls High School (SHMGHS) through the use of different sets of evidence, both oral and documentary (Sifuna, 1995).

3.1 Target Population

The target population was composed of individuals and organizations who have been acquainted with the life and work of Sr. Rita. These were the members of her family, the clergy and the Sisters of Mary of Kakamega, the former teachers, the SHMGHS alumnae and the education officials. Information about school reports and Kenya National Archives was also used in order to provide an institutional insight.

3.2 Sampling Techniques and Sample Size

The research used snowballing and purposive sampling to sample respondents. Purposive sampling techniques were used to select the participants in such a way that the respondents were the ones who have had personal experience with the leadership approach of Sr. Rita, however, snowballing enabled other informants to be identified with references. This ensured that there was a rich base of voice, mainly of people who had worked or studied under Sr. Rita.

3.3 Data Collection

Data were gathered both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources involved oral data through interviews with family members, clergy, teachers and alumni, but also included documentary evidence in the form of Kenya National Archives, school records and church documents. Secondary sources included published books, theses, journal articles and other written materials to put the growth of girl-child education in Kenya into perspective.

3.4 Data Analysis

The data gathered were also criticized internally and externally to test authenticity and credibility (Best and Kahn, 1993; Travers, 1978). Oral testimonies were cross-checked by corroboration and triangulation with the archival evidence. The validated data were organized later as per the study objectives on a thematic basis. This thematic research method helped the researcher to follow the educational history of Sr. Rita, the role she has played in the education of girls, and also the consequences of her leadership in SHMGHS.

3.5 Ethical considerations

Before questioning and interviewing, permission was obtained with all the relevant authorities like The Kenya National Archives (KNA) National Council of Science and Technology (NACOSTI) and another permit was obtained with Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology. The permit was applicable because it gave the researcher access to all authorized research zone and also easy access to other relevant people that were of importance to the research because they assisted the researcher in responding to the research questions appropriately. Interview findings were also confidential and not made accessible.

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IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

This research paper brings out the significance of the life and work of Sr. Rita Shisala Itebete in influencing the direction of girl-child education at the Sacred Heart Mukumu Girls High School (SHMGHS) in the period 1970-2003. We can best comprehend her story in two perspectives: the Great Man Theory (Carlyle, 1841), which positions her as a great leader whose vision shaped the school environment, and the Ecology Metaphor (Weaver-Hightower, 2008), which places her in the broader network of other teachers, students, parents, clergy and community actors that co-created the school environment.

4.1 Educational Background and Preparation

Sr.Rita was born on 19th February, 1944 to Ambrose Itebete Luyayi and Felistas Muyuka Itebete of Imi-lonje Ikuywa village of Shidodo Sub-Location, Khayega Location, Kakamega county. She was the seventh child. Her siblings were the Late Theresa Khasiala Itebete, Peter Nasiali Itebete, the Late John Tendwa Itebete, the late David Mukabwa Itebete, Mwalimu Vincent Wichenje Itebete and Clementina Indakuli Itebete (O.I; Clementina 08/05/2025). The statement was found to be similar to the research done by Amutabi and others (Amutabi, M.N et al 2024)She belonged to Catholic Diocese of Kakamega, the Sacred Heart Mukumu Parish. She was baptized Rita Shisala Itebete on 25th February,1944 by Father Burgman. She received her first Holy Communion on 20th December,1954 and on the same day, she was confirmed in the Catholic Faith (O. I; Clementina Itebete 09/05/2025) (Amutabi, M.N et al 2024)

The coming of Ursulin Sisters of Bergen in Netherlands paved a way in the uplifting of girls education in Western and Nyanza regions of Kenya. To ensure this idea was achieved, they founded girls schools for example Mukumu Girls Primary school (Mulievi 1993).

4.2 Academic Career

Sr Rita attended Mukumu Girls Primary between 1952 and 1959 when the school was headed by Sr.Karoli of the Ursulin Sisters. When she finished class eight, she did the Kenya African Preliminary Education (KAPE) and later developed an interest to join the religious life (O.I; Born 07/05/2025). She joined religious life through the inspiration of her teachers who she admired and wanted to be like (Kane and Staigers 2008)Among the teachers who inspired her were Sr.Benigna Musungu her class teacher, Madam Ann Mukachi, Madam Bereta Mecha her class two teachers, Sr. Patrick her class three teacher and Sr. Clemence Muhambe who inspired her to complete her Common Entrance Examination (CEE) successfully. During this time, Mukumu Girls Primary School was a center of the sisters which created an opportunity for learners to receive the powerful religious instructions , couching and mentoring (Berman 1974). This statement was confirmed to be true by an interviewee who is a resident of Khayega Location in Kakamega (O.I; Bonface 10/05/2025,

Sr. Rita also admired an ordinary called Clementina Akinyi when she was in class five after she was selected by Sr. Karoli to teach. Between class six and eight, some of her role models were Sr.Auxillia, Sr.Immacula, Sr.Adelaide Musungu and Sr. Auncilla Kupalo. Her classmate from class two to form four by the name Sr.Irma Isiongo also played a major role in motivating her towards achieving her religious success (O.I; Born 07/05/2025). This statement was also confirmed by Amutabi and other authors when they said that the nun's daily processions to the Marian Grotto at the Parish Church for their mid-morning prayers also inspired her so much (Amutabi, M.N et al 2024). From my view, this could be some of the reasons that inspired her to become a teacher.According to (Amutabi, M.N et al 2024) Sr.Rita enrolled at the Sacred Heart Mukumu Girls High School, Mukumu, the then St.Pius X Mukumu Girls Secondary School in 1960. She joined the group of Sisters of Mary of Kakamega in December 1962 at the end of form three. She joined Sisters of Mary of Kakamega because she had an interest of becoming a nun. She completed her year four of study in the year 1964. Sr.Rita did not join college immediately after form four, instead, she continued to work for and fulfill her dreams of becoming a Catholic nun. This statement was confirmed to be true from an interview done during the oral interview (O.I Clementina 09-05-2025).

She continued with this until the year 1966 when she finished and took her vows of becoming a sister. The vow was of obedience, poverty, and chastity and was given the name Sr.Irmgard and she never dropped the name Rita to allow ease of reference in her certificates (Pillay's and Rao 2002). Sr.Rita worked so hard to ensure the Mukumu Church undergone transformation and this made her become the pioneer African Principal of Mukumu Girls High School (Amutabi, M.N et al 2024)

Between 1960 and 1970, many Kenyans used to go to Universities abroad to acquire higher education (KNA: PC/NZA/3/10/2/2). This was because by then, Kenya's higher education still lacked the capacity to fulfill all the demands of University education. This made the government of Kenya to create a special programme to initiate the training of teachers. The Secondary Teacher Training Programme (S1) was among the programs that were initiated by the Kenyan government. It was started at Kenyatta University and was later transferred to Kenya Science Teachers

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College (Sifuna and Otiende 2006,KNA: PC/NZA/3/10/2/2)In 1967, the institute of Sisters of Mary of Kakamega took Sr. Rita to Kenyatta University College to train as a Secondary School Teacher. Sr. Rita was among the few girls who enrolled for the S1 teacher education course at Kenyatta College. She completed her S1 teacher education course in 1969. She studied History, English and Christian Religious Education (CRE) at this level (O.I Clementina 08/05/2025). This information was corroborated with information that were collected from the Kenya National Archive that proved it to be reliable (KNA: PC/NZA/3/10/2/2)From 1970 to 1972, Sr.Rita joined and taught in Mukumu Girls as a Christian Religious Education teacher. In 1972, she moved to St.Cecilia Girls High School, Misikhu as the principal. Sr.Rita served as the principal of St.Cecilia Girls High School, Misikhu until July 1974 when she left the school. Sr.Rita later joined one of the country's leading Catholic Universities, Seton Hall University, New Jersey, in the United States in the courtesy of Bishop Sulumenti. She completed her Bachelor of Education Degree in History and Christian Religious Education through working extra hard and smart.(KNA: PV/NZA/3/10/1/2,O.I;Joseph 20/05/2025). She also later graduated from the same university with a Masters of Education Degree. She developed her religious commitment fully and also her interest in teaching and learning. (Amutabi, M.N et al 2024)

4.3 Contributions of Sr Rita Shisala Itebete to the Development of Girl Child Education in Sacred Heart Mukumu Girls High School

Her leadership style closely mirrored aspects of African communitarian philosophy, emphasizing collective discipline, respect for elders, and holistic student development. Like other Catholic African women leaders such as Sr. Bernadette in Uganda, Sr. Rita's legacy reflects how African women educators shaped not just curriculum, but the moral compass of generations of girls.

4.3.1 Moral and Ethical Contributions

Sr. Rita involved various strategies to ensure she promoted the education of girls in Sacred Heart Mukumu Girls High School . She ensured she worked closely with her teachers, support staff and other education stakeholders to ensure a success on this. Mrs. Wanyama recalled that Sr. Rita sought to make the school "one family" guided by the principle of "leaving no one behind," thereby including teachers, support staff, and other stakeholders in the education of the girls (O.I. Mrs. Wanyama, 22 April 2025; KNA: MOE/2/17154).SHMGHS being a Catholic Sponsored School, guided with Catholic guidelines, she never discriminated teachers from other Religions. A Muslim teacher, Mr. Ramadhan who taught in SHMGHS between 1979 and 1984 affirms that Sr. Rita ensured that there was inclusion in the school. He affirms that sometimes she used to invite him to the assembly to lead in prayers despite being a Muslim. This made him to praise Sr. Rita claiming that she portrayed the qualities of a good leader through her calmness and inclusivity. This was confirmed from the oral interview which was done to a certain interviewee who used to work as a support staff who confirmed that Sr. Rita upheld inclusivity (O.I Joshua 22/05/2025,KNA:MOE/2/17154)

She also allowed the girls who were non Catholics to join SHMGHS to learn there. Through her coaching and inspiration, the girls succeeded and she even converted other girls who became Catholics while learning there in SHMGHS . The inclusion she practiced and stressed on really motivated the teachers to do their best and also lead to the success of the girls (O.I Wanyama 22-04-2025). This statement was also confirmed by another respondent who was also interviewed (O. I Thomas 18/05/2025,KNA:MOE/2/16340)Sr. Rita also cared for the welfare of her teachers to ensure they were comfortable at school to ensure they gave their best for the success of the girls. She did this by ensuring that whenever a teacher or any other member of support staff was bereaved, she could be seen coming in as a mother and the head of institution's family to give her full support. (O. I Sarah 02-05-2025,KNA:MOE/2/17154) This could have really motivated the teachers to put more efforts in their work to ensure the girls success as they felt being cared for by their principal Sr.Rita.

To ensure the teachers gave their best to the girls in the school, she motivated the teachers, gave them a listening ear and also worked closely with them. She was so understanding and made teachers to feel so loved and appreciated, this s really motivated the teachers to give towards the education of girls in SHMGHS leading to their success. Whenever any teacher went astray to the school guidelines she could shy away to reprimand him or her. She stood firm to condemn those who went out of order in a humble and respectful way to ensure all teachers and other staffs were on the right track. She loved her teachers and she could not easily release her teachers to other school as she wanted to a large and a happy school family (O.I Wanyama 22/04/2025,KNA:MOE/2/16340) Another way she used to ensure the success of the girls in the school was by ensuring she applied various unique management techniques as an administrator. She used to walk around in classes to ensure she monitored weather teaching was going on classes or not (KNA:MOE/2/17154) She ensured that no student was malingering around and no teacher or any other worker within the school was lazing around by visiting all the spaces of work. In any case she could find a class with no teacher due to lateness or any other reason she could get in that class and make the students engaged until when that teacher would come to class is when she could leave. She employed this strategy because she felt that

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it was a polite and a respectful way of correcting and encouraging the affected teacher to ensure they fully utilize the allocated lesson time to teach (O.I Wanyama 22-04-2025). This statement was corroborated with the archival source from the archives (KNA:MOE/2/16340)

As the manager of the school, Sr. Rita lead exemplary life to ensure girls emulated her character for their success. Sr. Rita practiced integrity, self-awareness, objectivity among other relevant moral values. Her girls also emulated all the moral values from her which drove them toward s achievement of their success. An alumna recalled Sr. Rita's emphasis on integrity: the girls should not act "because someone is watching" but because "it is moral and right." The same respondent recalled her emphasis on honesty and hard work, including the message that "nothing is free" and that the girls should work for what they wanted in life (O.I. Ndege, 20 April 2025; KNA: MOE/2/17154). SR. Rita also worked closely and unity with the Parents Teachers Association and the School Board of Management to ensure the success of the girls in SHMGHS. Mrs. Lukalo affirms that Sr. Rita was consistent and never misused the school resources and funds. He also said that Sr. Rita was an honest, respectful, discipline and faithful Catholic. She ensured that all girls dressed decently, had the right posture and were elegant. She also expected the girls to be respectful, faithful and consistent in their ways encouraging them to practice the same values at home and in the society as a whole, not only when in school. These qualities acquired by the girls greatly contributed to their academic achievements and success as they made them all round in their work. (O.I; Mrs. Beatrice 15/04/2025,KNA:MOE/2/17154). This values she expressed really impacted positively the development of SHMGHS.

4.3.2 Academic Contributions and Efforts on Co-Curricular Activities

During her time in SHMGHS, Sr. Rita never left out the girls who came from humble backgrounds and also those who were weak among them academically. She ensured she promoted inclusivity to allow all girls in SHMGHS achieve their dreams in academics and curriculum. Her aim was to bring out the best especially to those who were claimed to be weak. To those who came from humble background, she made their lives comfortable at school (O.I Nanjala 15/04/2025,KNA:MOE/2/17154) Sr. Rita had a close personal relationship with all the girls. She also ensured that she knew all the girls by their names, their place of origin, characters and also their strengths and weaknesses in their academic works. Whenever she identified the weak girls in the school she ensured that she made a follow up to ensure that the girls did their best in their academic work. By doing this, she taught the girls to always be just and practice fairness to all irrespective of their background or personal strengths for this would uphold peace, love and unity in the whole society as a whole (O.I Nanjala 15/04/2025,KNA:MOE/2/16340)In co-curricular activities, the girls were also not left out as this also contributed to their academic excellence. She encouraged the girls to join various school teams which she fully supported. However much she supported games activities, she still insisted that the do their academic work alongside games. She encouraged them to also concentrate on their core work, academics and also buy books for extra work after games (O.I Were 12/04/025,KNA:MOE/2/17154)This was also confirmed by another respondent from the Khayega Location in Kakamega (O.I Joseph 20/05/2025).

To those students who were unable to fully balance between sports and academics, they were eliminated from games so that they could concentrate on academics only. Sr. Rita wanted the school to excel all round in both academics and sports. Through this, the girls were able to have a chance to develop their talents in addition to their excellent performance in academic work. Through her efforts, SHMGHS got a history of being a champion in volleyball in 1990s and 1980s. Some of the talented girls, among them was the late Janet Wanja, got employment immediately after they completed their High School (KNA:MOE/2/17154,O.I; Were 12/04/2025) During her time in SHMGHS, she even became the patron of volleyball federation. She also made the school shine in other games like netball, hockey, basketball, music, traditional dance and drama. To ensure that all students were all round in school, this made them excel and grow academically and even socially. She also taught the professional Sisters on Mary when she was in SHMGHS who later on also excelled. Among them was a good friend of her called Aquinatta Lumili who is currently serving as a nurse in Mater Hospital, Nairobi (O.I Bonface 10/05/2025)(,KNA:MOE/2/16340).When she was still serving as the principal of SHMGHS, the school received a presidential award in 1986 as the best and cleanest school in the country from the then President Daniel Arap Moi (KNA:MOE/2/16340). She also contributed to academic at the inception of the 8-4-4 system of education where she contributed to the writing of Christian Religious Education syllabus and the teacher's guide for Christian Religious Education. She did this together with Mrs. Petronilla Kidakwa who helped her write the revised syllabus, Christian Religious Education books for Primary and Secondary Schools for Oxford Publishers (Amutabi, M.N et al 2024,O.I; Sarah 02/06/2025) .

4.4 Alumni Outcomes Positions Held by Old Girls of Sacred Heart Mukumu Girls High School in the Society

The impact of Sr. Rita's efforts and contributions in the society can be assessed by the development of the girl child in SHMGHS. The girls she inspired are now looked upon and are giving back to the society because it was through her guidance and inspiration that they succeeded. Their contributions are not only limited to SHMGHS, their societies, or their homes but in the country, Kenya, and the world at large. Through the effort that Sr. Rita put towards

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the success of her students in SHMGHS, many former students of SHMGHS whom she mentored have been playing major roles in promoting social, economic, and even political transformations back in their societies, in Kenya as a country, and even internationally. Sr. Rita propelled so many girls who became successful in life that it is not easy to have or document all the positions which are held by them and are still held by them. Therefore, the study has only picked a few old girls. These old girls have been having influence in Western Kenya, in the country, and also internationally through the mentorships that Sr. Rita gave them when they were in SHMGHS.

4.4.1 Dr Susane Nabulindo Masakhwe

Born in 1980 in Mumias, Kakamega County, she received her primary leaving certificate in 1997. She then attended SHMGHS in Mukumu town, Kakamega County. In 1999, she enrolled at the University of Nairobi, where she completed her studies in 2007, earning a Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery degree. In 2007, she was accepted into the Anesthesiology residency programme at Kenyatta National Hospital, which is administered by the University of Nairobi. This programme spanned four years, culminating in her obtaining a Master of Medicine degree in Anesthesiology. She graduated with her MMed degree in 2011.

Between 2013 and 2014, Dr. Masakhwe pursued an Anesthesiology Fellowship at the University of Nairobi. A portion of this fellowship was conducted in the United States, where she studied at Boston Children's Hospital and Monroe Carell Jr. Children's Hospital at Vanderbilt in Nashville, Tennessee. After completing the MMed programme, she was appointed as a lecturer at the University of Nairobi's School of Medicine. Concurrently, she practiced anesthesiology at Kenyatta National Hospital, the largest referral hospital in the country, which also serves as the teaching hospital for the University of Nairobi. Following her fellowship in 2014, she was designated as a Consultant Pediatric Anesthesiologist at the referral hospital. Additionally, she holds the position of Deputy Secretary of the Kenya Society of Anesthesiologists. In 2018, she was recognized as one of the "Top 40 Women Under 40 in Kenya" by Business Daily Africa, an English-language daily newspaper in Kenya.

In conclusion, Dr. Masakhwe's impressive postgraduate education, her roles as a lecturer and consultant Anesthesiologist (specializing in pediatrics), her leadership position in a professional society, and her recognition as a top young female leader in Kenya. This further exemplifies the success of SHMGHS alumni and implicitly highlights the positive impact of the education and mentorships provided during their time at the school.

4.4.2 Dr. Jacinta Aswani S. Kwena

Dr. Aswani attended Mukumu Girls High School for her 'O' Level. Between 1975 and 1976, she then proceeded to The Highlands Girls High School in Eldoret, Kenya, for her 'A' Level, taking Principal passes in Chemistry and Mathematics and subsidiary passes in Biology and General Paper. After attaining her 'A' Level, she was admitted to Kenyatta Teachers College between 1980 and 1983, where she trained and qualified as an S1 teacher of Chemistry and Biology. She later joined Kenyatta University in Nairobi, Kenya, between 1984 and 1987 for a Bachelor of Education Science, where she attained Second Class Honors - Upper Division in Mathematics and Chemistry. She proceeded and did her Master of Education in Educational Psychology in the same university in 1998.

In 1998, she enrolled in a Higher Diploma in Research Methodology, Computer, and Data Analysis Techniques in Danish-Bilharziasis Laboratory, Denmark. Dr. Aswani also did a Higher Diploma in Neuropsychology Assistant Method, a course sponsored by Nilo Maki Institute, between 1996 and 1999 at the University of Jyvaskyla, Finland. She also attended a course on Basic Counseling Skills in 2009 at Amani Counseling Centre, Nairobi, Kenya. In 2007, she attained her Ph.D. in Educational Psychology in 2007 from Kenyatta University.

In the year 2012, she attended proficiency in Chinese language and culture from Kenyatta University. Between 2012 and 2014 (August), she attended a higher diploma in Graphic Learning Intervention Programme in reading disabilities from Nilo Maki Institute, Finland.Between 1983 and 1984, she was a teacher of Chemistry and Mathematics in Nyang'ori Girls High School. In 1987, she taught Chemistry in Alliance High School. She later became a tutor (at the level of a senior lecturer) in Statistics, Test and Measurement between 1990 and 1991 in Kenya Technical Teachers College. She was also a lecturer in the Department of Educational Psychology, Teaching Statistics, Test and Measurements and Evaluation in Education and Research Methods in Education from 1991 to August 2012.In September 2012, she became a senior lecturer Pwani University in the Department of Educational Psychology, Teaching Statistics, Test, Measurement and Evaluation in Education and Research Methods in Education, and in 2014 she became the Dean of the School of Education at Pwani University.

4.4.3 Hon Lydia Atieno Ndege

Hon. Ndege attended Mumias River Primary School between 1991-1998. She later joined Mukumu Girls High School, where she learnt between 1999 and 2000. She later transferred to Loreto Girls, Kiambu, where she sat for her Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) in 2003. After completing her form four, she joined London College of St. Lawrence in Kampala for her 'A' levels that took from six months between 2003 and 200. During her

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time in Kampala, there were various individuals who inspired her to join politics and made her develop interest toward joining politics. Among these people were Hon. David Ndii (her elder brother), Hon. Omingo Magara (then former party leader of People's Democratic Party), Prof. Kivutha Kibwana, and Charity Ngilu (then cabinet secretary of Lands and Housing).After she started her political journey, she used to empower girl children in Kisumu, and she ended up empowering at least 20 girls. She showed her major contribution to the society during that time. She also used to encourage women to be brave enough and pursue their goals in their lives. She also advocated for skill development among youths. She encouraged the youths to use their skills instead of waiting for the six months from college. She later fulfilled her political career after she joined the People's Democratic Party (PDP) in Secretariat as a volunteer, which later made her be nominated as an MCA (Member of County Assembly) of Kisumu County between 2013 and 2017. She used this great opportunity to work with and include the youths and girl-child to ensure she improves their lives.

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated that Sr. Rita Shisala Itebete was critical in promoting the education of girl children in Sacred Heart Mukumu Girls High School in the period 1970 to 2003. It was through her education, career training, and religious calling that she was in a unique position to give the school a vision and integrity. Being the first African major principal of SHMGHS, she intertwined education with integrity, inclusiveness, and extracurricular empowerment and made the institution a hub of holistic growth. The results highlight her legacy as a wonderful leader as discussed under the Great Man Theory and as a generator who functions within an educational ecosystem as defined by the Ecology Metaphor. Her impact was not limited to the Mukumu Girls walls, but she gave birth to generations of women leaders in the fields of medicine, politics, academia and others. Through this, the contributions of Sr. Rita can be seen as an example of how visionary leadership can transform education through promoting equity, excellence, and empowerment.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study suggests a conscious acknowledgement of women leadership in education, past and present practice. Educational policy makers ought to focus more on chronicling the lives and contributions of female leaders like Sr. Rita, as the lives of such leaders are some of the most important lessons to learn when it comes to raising inclusive and transformative leaders. Moreover, mentorship and spiritual development should be embedded in the educational frameworks of schools and training institutions, which should be inspired by the example of Sr. Rita who combines discipline, academic rigor and co-curricular involvement. On the same note, the government and the church institutions must work harder to support women in leadership roles to guarantee continuity in girls' empowerment. Last but not least, there is a necessity to extend the studies on the communal contribution of the Sisters of Mary of Kakamega whose joint practice resulted in the creation of the enabling environment in which Sr. Rita could act and in which the further development of girl-child education in Western Kenya and all over was supported.

Declaration of Interest

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APPENDIX 1

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