

Educational policies and colonization: schooling in Eritrea under Italian rule (1890-1941)

Bomi Yi
Department of Education
University of Roma Tre (Italy)
bomi.yi@uniroma3.it

ABSTRACT: In the context of Italian colonization in Eritrea, education was strategically used as a central mechanism of the colonial regime's political agenda. This paper aims to present the major historiographical perspectives on the development of Italian schools from 1890 until the onset of British occupation in 1941. The establishment and growth of these schools reveal a complex interweaving of economic, social, and political dynamics, which not only reinforced the colonial presence but also intensified tensions between the Italian settlers and the Eritrean population. Analysis of archival documents indicates that educational policies acted as both an instrument of control and a space of ambivalent possibilities, providing a contested ground between enforced assimilation and local identity claims.

EET/TEE KEYWORDS: Italian schools in Eritrea; Italian immigration; Indigenous education; Italianization; Eritrea; XX Century.

In the context of Italian colonization in Eritrea, education played a central role, closely aligned with colonial policy. Rodolfo Micacchi, who served as the Inspector General for Schools and Archaeology at the Ministry of Italian Africa, stated in 1932: «the issue of education in the colony, whether concerning metropolitan citizens or specifically relating to the indigenous population, is essentially a political issue, whose resolution necessarily depends on the general directives of colonial policy»¹.

This perspective reflected an approach that subordinated educational or-

¹ R. Micacchi, *L'istruzione elementare nelle Colonie italiane durante il primo decennio del Governo Fascista*, «Annali della istruzione elementare», vol. 7, n. 4-5, 1932, p. 104 (my translation).

ganization to political and demographic needs. On one hand, schools for Italian immigrants were designed as tools to facilitate their settlement in the colony, addressing the need to establish a stable Italian community. On the other hand, the education of the indigenous population was planned in accordance with the colonial government's policies, which sought to balance effective administrative control with the seemingly generous provision of education².

Building on this reflection, this essay seeks to compare several theses advanced by historiography in the field of educational history in Eritrea, focusing on the origins and development of the Italian schools established in Eritrea during the period from the beginning of Italian colonization in 1890 to the British occupation in 1941.

The analysis will employ an analytical approach grounded in a partial review of archival documentation held at the Archivio Storico Diplomatico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri and the Archivio Centrale dello Stato in Italy. Although these sources have only been partially examined, they provide insights into not only the historical status of the schools but also the perspectives and approaches adopted by the Italian government in addressing educational challenges for both the Italian settlers and the local population. This analysis is positioned within the broader context of Italianization strategies, revealing how the government tailored its educational policies to address demographic and cultural objectives in the colony.

1. *The origins and initial expansion of Italian schools in Eritrea*

After 1882, when the Bay of Assab was formally acquired by the Italian government through an agreement with the Rubattino shipping company, the early years of the Italian presence in Eritrea were marked by the influx of missionaries, adventurers, soldiers, and merchants. It was only in the 1890s, after approval by the Italian Parliament in 1890, that selected farming families arrived to launch an experimental agricultural colonization project. This initiative aimed to transform Eritrea into a settlement colony while providing a partial solution to the rural overpopulation affecting Southern Italy³. However, these early attempts at agricultural colonization soon failed, and particularly following the defeat at Adwa in 1896, the government ceased the project, implementing restrictive measures that curtailed opportunities for agricultural emigration⁴. Testament to the limited success of this endeavor, by 1893, the

² *Ibid.*

³ G.L. Podestà, *Emigrazione e colonizzazione in Libia e Africa orientale*, «Altretalia», n. 42, 2011, p. 37.

⁴ E. Ertola, *Il colonialismo degli italiani*, Roma, Carocci, 2022, pp. 52-72.

Italian civilian population in Eritrea was only 623 individuals, with women comprising just 70 of this number⁵.

In the report drafted on June 11, 1894, by Oreste Baratieri, then Governor of Eritrea, the existing educational institutions were cataloged and classified into two main categories: those managed by the government and those administered by missionaries⁶.

The first category includes boys' secular schools located in Massawa, Keren, Archico, Asmara, and Assab, along with girls' schools run by the Sisters of Charity in Massawa and the Daughters of St. Anne in Assab. Additionally, there were practical Italian language schools operating in the local troop barracks. The second category comprises the seminaries in Keren and Acrur, directed by the Lazarist Fathers of the French Mission, as well as external and internal schools managed by the Sisters of Charity in Keren, under the supervision of the Lazarist Fathers⁷. In addition to these, there are the schools in Zazega, Belesa, and Gheleb, administered by the Swedish Protestant Mission⁸, which arrived in Eritrea in 1866⁹.

Baratieri endeavored to promoting a greater dissemination of the Italian language and culture through the reform of the educational system. The Italian government, viewing the French missionaries as obstacles to this goal, accused them of insufficiently promoting the Italian language among the local population, alleging they were instead exploiting «the Catholic and Coptic

⁵ Podestà, *Emigrazione e colonizzazione in Libia e Africa orientale*, cit., p. 37.

⁶ *Report from Oreste Baratieri to the Minister of Foreign Affairs* (Asmara, June 11, 1894), in Archivio Centrale dello Stato [ACS], Ministero dell'Africa Italiana [MAI], DG Affari Civili, Ispettorato scuole [IS], b. 160. Before the intervention of the Italian government in the educational sector in Eritrea, local educational institutions already existed, such as Coptic and Quranic schools, which traditionally provided Eritrean students with an education oriented towards ecclesiastical careers. The curriculum of these schools was primarily based on the reading of sacred texts, with a training path that began with the alphabet, through which students acquired the fundamental skills of reading and writing. Additionally, there were schools established by missionaries, both Catholic and Protestant, which further enriched the educational offerings in the region (G. Puglisi, *La scuola in Eritrea ieri e oggi*, «Africa: Rivista trimestrale di studi e documentazione dell'Istituto italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente», vol. 8, n. 3, 1953, p. 69).

⁷ The origins of schools managed by French missionaries in Eritrea can be traced back to 1839, with the efforts of Giustino de Jacobis, a missionary of the Congregation of the Mission (Lazarists) and the first bishop-founder of the Catholic Mission in Abyssinia. De Jacobis initially focused on founding schools in the Eritrean highlands that were primarily devoted to religious instruction and the training of indigenous clergy. Later, with the support of Governor Munzinger – who had previously endorsed the French Mission in the Egyptian territories of the region before 1875 – the Daughters of Charity established the first elementary school for Eritrean girls in Keren in 1878. Additionally, a vocational school was established to provide practical training in typography, bookbinding, carpentry, and metalwork, aimed at local youth with essential skills for employment (Puglisi, *La scuola in Eritrea ieri e oggi*, cit., p. 70).

⁸ *Report from Oreste Baratieri to the Minister of Foreign Affairs*, cit.

⁹ J. Miran, *Missionaries, Education & the State in the Italian Colony of Eritrea*, in H.B. Hansen, M. Twaddle (edd.), *Cristian Missionaries & the State in the Third World*, Athens, Ohio University press, 2002, p. 123.

tribes for their own material advantage»¹⁰. Consequently, in 1894, the French Lazarist Fathers were expelled from the colony and replaced by the Italian Capuchins, supported by the Daughters of St. Anne¹¹, who assumed the educational roles previously held by the Daughters of Charity. The Daughters of St. Anne established schools in Keren in 1895, in Asmara in 1898, and in Saganeiti in 1904¹². With the arrival of the Italian missionaries and their establishment of schools, the Italian government provided adequate support and rigorous oversight to ensure the educational direction of the schools under the Apostolic Prefecture aligned with the national objectives of the government's colonial mission¹³. Simultaneously, these educational institutions were valued by the missionaries as promising tools to continue their religious work among the local populations, facilitating direct and meaningful contact with them.

During the governorship of Ferdinando Martini, who served from 1897 to 1907, the European population in the colony grew significantly, reaching a total of 3,949 residents in 1905, of which 754 were under the age of fifteen, with a distribution of 409 males and 345 females¹⁴. In this process of expansion, Governor Ferdinando Martini strictly enforced the separation between Italians and the local Eritrean population, specifically by denying the latter access to European education. Martini's firm stance stemmed from his belief that an educated indigenous population could potentially threaten the stability of colonial rule. Consequently, Martini paid little attention to establishing educational opportunities for the native Eritrean population. However, he remained notably dedicated to promoting the education of Italian settlers in Eritrea¹⁵. In 1902, a government school was established in Asmara to provide elementary education to European children, both boys and girls, aged between

¹⁰ *Report from Oreste Baratieri to the Minister of Foreign Affairs*, cit. (my translation).

¹¹ The Apostolic Prefecture of Eritrea was established on September 13, 1894, following agreements between the Holy See and the Italian government. On October 1 of the same year, the newly formed Prefecture was entrusted to the Capuchins of the Province of Rome. In 1911, it was elevated to the status of Apostolic Vicariate and placed under the care of the Capuchins from the Province of Milan. See, for example, U. Chelati Dirar, *Collaborazione e conflitti: Michele da Carbonara e l'organizzazione della Prefettura Apostolica dell'Eritrea (1894-1910)*, in A. Triulzi (ed.), *La colonia: italiani in Eritrea*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2002, pp. 149-188; C. Marongiu Buonaiuti, *Politica e religioni nel colonialismo italiano (1882-1941)*, Milano, Giuffrè, 1982, pp. 58-67; M. Da Nembro, *La missione dei minori cappuccini in Eritrea (1894-1952)*, Roma, Institutum historicum Ord. Fr. Min. cap., 1953, pp. 1-94.

¹² Puglisi, *La scuola in Eritrea ieri e oggi*, cit., p. 70.

¹³ G. Ciampi, *La scuola nelle colonie*, in C. Ghezzi (ed.), *Fonti e problemi della Politica Coloniale italiana. Atti del convegno (Taormina-Messina, 23-29 ottobre 1989)*, 2 vols., Roma, Ministero per i Beni culturali e ambientali – Ufficio centrale per i beni archivistici, 1996, Vol. II, p. 678.

¹⁴ Ministero delle Colonie, *Allegati alla Relazione sulla colonia eritrea del R. commissario civile deputato Ferdinando Martini per gli esercizi 1902-1907. Presentata dal ministro delle colonie, Bertolini nella seduta del 14 giugno 1913*, 2 vols., Roma, Tipografia della camera dei deputati, 1913, Vol. II, pp. 110-111.

¹⁵ M. Romandini, *Il problema scolastico nella colonia Eritrea: Gli anni 1898-1907*, «Afri-

6 to 12¹⁶. In 1904, another school opened in Keren with an initial enrollment of 25 students¹⁷, and in 1905, a new institution was founded in Adi Ugri, serving 17 Italian students of both genders¹⁸.

Due to budget limitations, Ferdinando Martini, at the first Italian colonial congress held in Asmara in 1905, proposed entrusting the education of Italian students to the Catholic Mission to ensure quality schooling. Regarding the education of the local Eritrean population, Martini emphasized that schooling should not be mandatory or standardized, although he recognized the importance of establishing schools for the children of regional leaders. These schools aimed to provide basic education, with a particular focus on teaching the Italian language¹⁹.

When Giuseppe Salvago Raggi assumed the role of governor in 1908, the new approach took shape, centered on the differing belief that it was necessary to «civilize, educate, and protect the local Eritrean population»²⁰, fostering a community of contented subjects naturally inclined to support colonial governance²¹. In 1909, with the Decreto Reale n. 800 of January 3, it was decreed that elementary education for the indigenous population would be provided on a voluntary basis, whereas it would be mandatory for Europeans in the primary centers of Eritrea²². In particular, for the education of the local population, «special programs were designed to provide them with knowledge of the basics of the Italian language and elementary arithmetic»²³. These programs were primarily focused on practical skills, aiming to prepare students

ca: Rivista trimestrale di studi e documentazione dell'Istituto italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente», vol. 39, n. 3, 1984, p. 497.

¹⁶ «Bollettino Ufficiale della Colonia Eritrea», n. 46, 15 novembre 1902.

¹⁷ «Bollettino Ufficiale della Colonia Eritrea», n. 11, 12 marzo 1904.

¹⁸ Ministero delle Colonie, *Relazione sulla colonia eritrea del R. commissario civile deputato Ferdinando Martini per gli esercizi 1902-1907; presentata dal ministro delle colonie, Bertolini, nella seduta del 14 giugno 1913*, 5 vols., Roma, Tipografia della Camera dei deputati, 1913, Vol. I, p. 149.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 149-150.

²⁰ G. Salvago Raggi, *Giuseppe Salvago Raggi*, Roma, Ministero affari esteri – Servizio storico e documentazione, 1977, p. 90 (my translation).

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 89-91. «If the indigenous people are not to be destroyed, they must be civilized, educated, and protected, so as to turn them into contented subjects, who by necessity will have a vested interest in supporting us. Therefore, [...] it has been outlined as a guiding principle to ensure fair justice for indigenous subjects, in accordance with their traditions, while adapting its application to the needs of civilization, and to guarantee the populations the enjoyment of their lands» (*Ibid.*, p. 90) (my translation).

²² G. Mondaini, *La legislazione coloniale italiana nel suo sviluppo storico e nel suo stato attuale 1882-1940*, 2 vols., Milano, Istituto per gli studi di politica internazionale, 1941, Vol. I, p. 208.

²³ *Promemoria sulle istituzioni scolastiche dell'Eritrea* (Asmara, August 3, 1914), in Archivio storico diplomatico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri [ASMAE], Ex Ministero Africa Italiana [EMAI], Ministero Africa Italiana [MAI] III, b. 37. It is a typewritten document without the name of the editor or a signature (my translation).

for schools of Arts and Crafts and to equip the younger generations with the competencies necessary for productive participation in the colony's economy.

Based on this idea, on November 15, 1908, the government inaugurated the bilingual "Ferdinando Martini" school in Massawa²⁴, designed primarily for the children of local merchants. The curriculum at this school emphasized commercial correspondence and accounting, aiming to provide students with practical skills for trade and business²⁵. Subsequently, in 1911, with Decreto Governatoriale n. 1375 of June 5, the "Salvago Raggi" School of Arts and Crafts was established in Keren. This school primarily aimed at educating the Muslim Eritrean population, with a curriculum that included Italian and Arabic language instruction, Quranic studies, and physical education, alongside vocational training in blacksmithing, carpentry, and telegraphy²⁶. By 1914, further expansion included the founding of the "San Giorgio" Government School in Adi Ugri with Decreto Governatoriale of June 13. This school targeted the sons of the colony's Coptic leaders, aiming to prepare them for roles in district and provincial administration²⁷. The same year, the "San Michele" Government School was opened in Saganeiti and featured a free boarding facility. In addition to elementary education, this institution provided vocational training with courses in mechanics, carpentry, tailoring, saddlery, and shoe-making, welcoming indigenous students of all religious backgrounds. These schools employed both Italian teachers and local assistants²⁸, reflecting an effort to blend western educational principles with professional training adapted to the colony's unique requirements.

A report of the educational institutions operating within the country, titled *Scuole* and written in 1913, emphasizes the cooperative efforts made to advance education. In Asmara, a government elementary school was available

²⁴ Puglisi, *La scuola in Eritrea ieri e oggi*, cit., p. 112.

²⁵ The school was established with the aim of training future indigenous clerks to be employed in lower-level administrative positions, inspired by the model of English schools in Sudan, Somalia, and India. The academic year 1908-1909 began with 45 enrolled students, aged between seven and fourteen years, and the curriculum included lessons in Italian, arithmetic, geography, and Arabic. See, *La scuola bilingue governativa di Massaua*, «Rivista Coloniale», vol. 5, n. 1, 1910, pp. 221-225.

²⁶ *Istituzione di una scuola d'arti e mestieri in Cheren*, «I Diritti della Scuola», vol. 11, n. 15, 1910, pp. 110-111.

²⁷ Within a few months of the opening of the "San Giorgio" School, approximately fifty students were enrolled, both boarders and day students. The curriculum included elementary education in the Italian language, as well as instruction in Tigrinya and Amharic, religious studies, and physical and sports activities. For older students, a comprehensive military training program was also introduced, aimed at enabling them to directly join the ranks of the troops as non-commissioned officers, should they wish to do so (*Scuola S. Giorgio*, Typewritten Report from the Regional Commissariat of Seræ, [Adi Ugri, August 31, 1912], in ASMAE, EMAI, Archivio Eritrea [AE], b. 145).

²⁸ *Le scuole dell'Eritrea*, in ACS, MAI, DG Affari Civili, IS, b. 152. This is a typescript lacking the name of the author, signature, and date, but it was likely written after 1939.

to both male and female students from Italian and assimilated communities, offering a comprehensive curriculum overseen by four lay instructors. Additionally, another government school, under the direction of Father Bonomi²⁹, served the local Eritrean population, concentrating on Italian language and arithmetic instruction. The Catholic Mission played a significant role, operating an elementary school for Eritrean students – open to both boys and girls – that was partially government funded. Furthermore, the Catholic Mission maintained an additional school for Eritrean students, accommodating both resident and external pupils. The Schools of Arts and Crafts for Italian students were administered by the *Società Operaia di Asmara* and the Swedish Mission, with Italian language instruction provided by an Italian teacher. Broadening the educational offerings, the Catholic Mission also established an agricultural school specifically for the Eritrean population. Additionally, Greek and Jewish institutions contributed to the educational diversity in Asmara, enriching the city's academic landscape.

In Massawa, two primary schools were operational: the government school “Ferdinando Martini” and a mixed elementary school administered by the Catholic Mission, which also received government support. In Keren, educational institutions included an elementary school run by the Catholic Mission and a school of Arts and Crafts. The “San Giorgio” school was active in Adi Ugri, while additional mixed elementary schools, funded by the government, were established in Saganaiti and Adi Caieh. In areas such as Monoxeitò, Halai, and Ad Teclean, the Catholic Mission managed schools for the Eritrean population, while the Swedish Mission expanded educational opportunities in regions such as Barentù, Zarrega, Belesa, Gluleb, Tolè, Cul-lucù, and Baresa³⁰.

The proliferation of educational institutions underscored the colony's increasing emphasis on education. Governor De Martino highlighted this priority in a circular written in 1916, framing public education as an essential component of the state administration's social responsibilities. A key objective in educating the native population was, as he expressed, «to the greatest extent possible [...] to prepare the new generations of colonial subjects, who, born under our flag, must soon learn to appreciate its benefits and admire

²⁹ Father Luigi Bonomi was born in Verona in 1841 and was ordained a priest in 1864. In 1874, he joined the Institute founded by Daniele Comboni and departed for Khartoum as a missionary, collaborating with Monsignor Comboni in Sudan. In 1887, he arrived in Eritrea as a chaplain to General Orero's troops and founded a school for local people in Massawa. Subsequently, in Asmara, he established a school for Eritreans and Italians. Through these schools, he promoted the spread of the Italian language and Christianity, dedicating himself to the mission until his death in February 1927 (G. Puglisi, *Chi è? Dell'Eritrea 1952. Dizionario biografico. Con una cronologia*, Asmara, Agenzia Regina, 1952, p. 54).

³⁰ *Scuole*, typewritten report without the author's name, handwritten date of late 1913, in ASMAE, EMAI, MAI III, b. 37.

its prestige»³¹. This aspiration, however, was believed to necessitate the intellectual and moral advancement of the native population. Only through this cultural elevation could the intended transformation occur, bridging the gap «between a subjugation aimed at civil living and the amorphous semi-barbaric social agglomeration exemplified by the indigenous person born and living outside the borders of the Colony»³².

In a 1918 report, Aldo Bibolini, then Head of the Mining Office in the Eritrean colony, emphasized the instrumental role of education in the colonial agenda, viewing it as a means to develop a labor force tailored to the colony's economic demands. Bibolini, in alignment with the policies of the time, remarked:

[Schools for the indigenous population] should instead be envisioned primarily as a means to train the labor force necessary for the needs of the Colony, both for local industries and commerce, as well as for manual labor and administrative roles in private and public offices. Additionally, they should serve to instill in the indigenous people a sufficient degree of culture to foster an appreciation and rational respect for our civilizing efforts. [...] Regardless of the specific distinctions adopted for schools of arts and crafts or trade schools, which correspond to the definition previously proposed, one thing is certain: they must share a minimum level of general education. This minimum requires the challenging task of reconciling our European perspectives with the non-brutish Abyssinian mentality and the industrialization needs of colonial domains, which must first be established and then rationally achieved. In our view, this minimum should focus exclusively on the essential cultural requirements necessary for various labor technologies, which can be tangibly summarized by the following formula: the need to learn, to read and to write sufficiently to understand and convey a simple order or an elementary work account³³.

This educational vision materialized in 1921, when the Italian government formalized regulations concerning the education of the indigenous population through Decreto Governatoriale n. 3808 of September 12. This decree outlined a structured educational system for the Eritrean population, categorized into three tiers: elementary school, school of arts and crafts, and secondary school. Each level had distinct subjects and objectives, designed to align with the practical needs of the colonial workforce. The teaching of the Italian language was mandatory across all schools, with a strong emphasis on the functional and pragmatic aspects of the curriculum.

However, the increase in the Italian population, combined with the proliferation of schools run by missionary religious congregations alongside government institutions, created an atmosphere of tension and conflict³⁴. In re-

³¹ *Pubblica Istruzione*, Circular by De Martino the Governor of Eritrea, typewritten (Keren, December 31, 1916), in ASDMAE, EMAI, AE, b. 145 (my translation).

³² *Ibid.* (my translation).

³³ *Sull'istruzione agli indigeni: proposte preliminari*, typewritten and signed by Aldo Bibolini (Asmara, July 29, 1918), in ASDMAE, EMAI, AE, b. 145 (my translation).

³⁴ A. Piccioli, *La scuola e le istituzioni educative*, in Id. (ed.), *La Nuova Italia d'Oltremare*, 2 vols., Milano, A. Mondadori, 1933, Vol. II, p. 1148.

sponse, the colonial government in 1923 decided to consolidate instruction in government elementary schools for Europeans under the management of the Daughters of St. Anne, leveraging their educational expertise³⁵ to ensure greater oversight of the educational environment. This reorganization culminated in 1929, with Decreto Governatoriale n. 4818 of October 17 appointing Sister Maria Del Poz, a member of the Daughters of St. Anne, as the educational director of the government elementary schools for Europeans in Eritrea, further centralizing educational administration.

Meanwhile, in 1926, Governor Jacopo Gasparini, responding to increased demands from the Eritrean population for advanced education³⁶, established the “Vittorio Emanuele III” school, funded by the Italian State. This institution, organized as a six-year program, aimed to promote «a process of real civilization»³⁷ among the native population, which was intended non-merely to impart knowledge but to encourage «the gradual assimilation of ideas, principles and system»³⁸.

In an additional effort to strengthen regulatory control over education and instruction, the government issued Decreto Governatoriale n. 4603 on September 8, 1928, standardizing the requirements for private schools. The decree mandated that all private institutions secure government approval³⁹ and required a minimum of six hours of Italian language instruction per week across all schools, for both Italian and Eritrean students.

Figure 1 shows the increase in student enrollment – both native and European – across the academic years from 1921-22 to 1931-32. Analysis of the data reveals consistent growth in European students’ numbers, which rose from approximately 200 in the 1921-22 academic year to around 1,400 by 1931-32. This trend is supported by historical data, which show that between 1913 and 1931, the Italian civilian population in Eritrea grew from 2,410 to

³⁵ With the arrival of the first group of the Daughters of St. Anne in 1886, the foundation of numerous schools in Eritrea commenced. The first educational institutions were established in 1895 in Keren, followed by those in Asmara in 1898, Saganeiti in 1904, Ghinda in 1906, Addi Caieh in 1908, Addi Ugri in 1909, Barentù in 1913, and Mehlalab in 1922, among other locations (G.P. Carini, R. La Cordara, *Storia della scuola italiana in Eritrea*, Ravenna, Giorgio Pozzi, 2014, pp. 32-34).

³⁶ Telegram from Jacopo Gasparini (Asmara, May 22, 1925), in ACS, MAI, DG Affari Civili, IS, b. 161.

³⁷ Puglisi, *La scuola in Eritrea ieri e oggi*, cit., p. 112 (my translation).

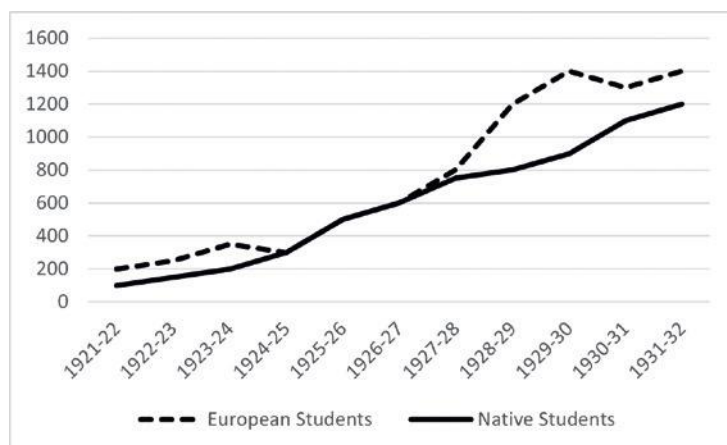
³⁸ *Ibid.* (my translation).

³⁹ In 1928, these directives were concretely implemented with the authorization to open several elementary schools for Italians in key colonial centers. Notable examples include those managed by the Daughters of St. Anne (Decreto Governatoriale n. 4618, October 2, 1928), the Catholic Mission School in Keren (Decreto Governatoriale n. 4646, December 19, 1928), and the Evangelical Mission School in Cullucù (Decreto Governatoriale n. 4647, December 22, 1928). In 1929, additional institutions were approved, such as the schools of the Evangelical Mission in Asmara (Decreto Governatoriale n. 4654, January 2, 1929 and Decreto Governatoriale n. 4673, January 25, 1929), and those in Adi Ugri (Decreto Governatoriale n. 4682 February 1, 1929).

4,188, with Italians born in Eritrea making up about 40% of the total Italian population in the colony⁴⁰.

Similarly, the enrollment of local students also demonstrated a steady upward trend, increasing from approximately 100 in the 1921-22 academic year to around 1,200 by 1931-32. This growth pattern of local students parallels that of European students, indicating that the rise in student numbers may be attributed to two primary factors. First, Eritrea's population saw a substantial increase, growing from 274,944 inhabitants in 1905 to 596,013 by 1931⁴¹. Second, there was a notable rise in interest in education among the local population, which contributed to increase in school enrollment among the local population.

Pic. 1. European and indigenous school population in Eritrea's colonial schools. Source: Piccioli, *La scuola e le istituzioni educative*, in Id. (ed.), *La Nuova Italia d'Oltremare*, cit., p. 1149.



2. The school system between 1931-1941

Following the Decreto Governatoriale n. 3808 of September 12, 1921, subsequent governors committed to promoting greater uniformity within the educational system. However, this uniformity was not always advantageous nor universally applicable, given the need for inevitable local adaptations and the establishment of new schools without formal provisions. Concurrently, the increasing educational and cultural aspirations of the Eritrean population and

⁴⁰ G.L. Podestà, *Mito e realtà del progetto demografico*, in G.P. Calchi Novati (ed.), *L'Africa d'Italia*, Roma, Carocci, 2021, p. 185.

⁴¹ G. Ciampi, *La popolazione dell'Eritrea*, «Bollettino della società geografica italiana», vol. 11, n. 12, 1995, p. 505.

the growing need for qualified native personnel in the increasingly complex industrial, commercial, and administrative sectors underscored the inadequacy of the elementary education available to the local population⁴². Moreover, the educational system and its curricula suffered from significant disorganization.

Rodolfo Micacchi, in his analysis of the challenges facing the Eritrean educational system, emphasized the difficulties encountered compared to those in Libya. First, in Eritrea, due to the relatively small immigration population, less importance was given to education and hence an extensive educational infrastructure for Italian students was unnecessary. Additionally, in schools for the native population, the variety of languages, customs, religions, and traditions among the different groups complicated efforts to establish a uniform educational system. Second, environmental and climatic conditions, alongside economic constraints, hindered the transfer of secular teachers to the region⁴³. In response to these challenges, Decreto Governatoriale n. 5226 of April 8, 1931, aimed to reform provisions related to the education of the local population. This reform sought to ensure that instruction adhered to government directives by consolidating educational content into a standardized framework.

The new educational system established three categories of schools: the school of arts and crafts, elementary school, and secondary school designated for native individuals and those considered assimilated. These institutions aimed to «prepare colonial subjects and assimilated individuals for the practice of arts, trades, and commerce, provide them with an adequate general education, and prepare them for public and private employment»⁴⁴.

One of the major innovations introduced was the establishment of three vocational schools in Keren, Adi Ugri, and Agordat, each offering a three-year program accessible to students of all religious backgrounds, thus eliminating the previous religious affiliation of these institutions. Public elementary schools adopted a four-year curriculum, with the addition of practical and agronomic subjects⁴⁵.

A significant advancement was the introduction of a secondary school for the native population, intended to provide regulated and restricted education

⁴² *Nuovo ordinamento scolastico per gli indigeni*, Report by Riccardo Astuto di Lucchese to the Ministro delle Colonie (Asmara, May 13, 1931), in ACS, MAI, DG Affari Civili, IS, b. 161.

⁴³ Micacchi, *L'istruzione elementare nelle Colonie italiane durante il primo decennio del Governo Fascista*, cit., p. 105.

⁴⁴ Decreto Governatoriale n. 5226 of April 8, 1931, art. 2 (my translation).

⁴⁵ *Scuole ed ordinamento scolastico in Eritrea*, in ASMAE, EMAI, MAI III, b. 37. This is a typewritten document without a date or signature, drafted after 1931. The established elementary schools included: "Vittorio Emanuele III" in Asmara, "S. Giorgio" in Adi Ugri, "S. Michele" in Saganeiti, a bilingual school in Massawa, and a bilingual school in Assab. In these institutions, the curriculum was structured around the following subjects: Italian language, general knowledge, history and geography, educational norms, arithmetic, geometry and drawing, local language, practical agricultural knowledge, and physical education (art. 5).

to meet the needs of the colonial system while reducing potential risks of socio-political unrest⁴⁶. Such risks could arise both from the demands of the local middle classes for higher levels of education⁴⁷ and from the government's partial willingness to support such educational advancement. Both scenarios were perceived as potentially threatening to the interests of the colony. However, one year later, this school was abolished because «its grandiose name created considerable misunderstandings among students whose aspirations often exceeded the common capacity»⁴⁸. It was subsequently replaced with a two-year advanced course intended to supplement the knowledge acquired during the initial four years of schooling⁴⁹.

In November 1932, with the issuance of Decreto Governatoriale n. 6275 on November 21, the Central Directorate of Primary Schools was established in Asmara. This organization was responsible for overseeing the technical and disciplinary aspects of all primary educational institutions in the colony, both public and private, and serving both Eritrean and Italian populations. Andrea Festa⁵⁰ was appointed as the central director, bringing with him extensive experience from his previous service in Libya. This Central Directorate functioned as a coordinating body to ensure the educational efficiency of the school system.

In 1935, during the war, all school buildings were requisitioned by military authorities, with the exception of the secondary school and the Italian

⁴⁶ *Nuovo ordinamento scolastico per gli indigeni*, cit.

⁴⁷ From 1905 onwards, Eritrea experienced a substantial increase in the export of Italian cotton textiles, establishing itself as the fourth largest market for Italy's cotton industry. In a context marked by the limited presence of European residents, this commercial expansion reflected the progressive integration of the local population into market economy dynamics. This development facilitated the emergence of a native middle class, whose social and cultural significance was highlighted in a 1931 report by Governor Riccardo Astuto, addressed to the Ministry of the Colonies. The report emphasized, among other points, the necessity of establishing secondary schools for the children of local elites and affluent families to prevent them from pursuing their education in Ethiopia (Podestà, *Mito e realtà del progetto demografico*, cit., p. 185).

⁴⁸ A. Festa, *Le istituzioni educative in Eritrea*, in Istituto Superiore di Scienze Sociali e Politiche Cesare Alfieri, Centro di Studi Coloniali (edd.), *Atti del secondo congresso di studi coloniali (Napoli, 1-15 ottobre 1934)*, 7 vols., Firenze, Tipografia Giuntina, 1935, Vol. II, p. 293 (my translation).

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Andrea Festa, born in Savoia di Lucania on January 19, 1898, held significant positions in the field of education in Libya and Eritrea between 1919 and 1949. In 1926-27, he founded and directed the rural school for indigenous students at Suk el Giuma, where he also organized evening courses for Muslim natives. Later, he became the head of the central school for Muslim natives, the "Mussolini" School in Tripoli, where he promoted the integration of teaching and school management. From 1927 to 1932, he directed the Western Circle of Tripoli, which included special schools for Jewish and Muslim students, including the "Niccolò Tommaseo" school for students with trachoma. In 1932, with D.G. n. 6276 of November 22th, he was appointed Central director of elementary schools in Eritrea. (*Direzione Generale degli Affari Civili. Ispettorato Scuole n. 315589*, typewritten, signed by Mele, Rome, February 3, 1950, in ASMAE, EMAI, Ministero dell'Africa Italiana – Ispettorato scuole, 1606 Andrea Festa).

elementary school “Principe di Piemonte”, which were relocated to temporary facilities⁵¹.

Following the proclamation of the Empire, Italy recognized the strategic importance of developing an educational system for the indigenous population in Eritrea, addressing both newly annexed territories and previously colonized areas⁵². The primary objective became the expansion of elementary education, aimed at providing the local population with training suited to their needs while also meeting the requirements of the Italian community. Particular attention was given to establishing special sections for local female students, focusing primarily on domestic skills⁵³. This educational project was conceived as a fundamental instrument to «improve the spiritual living conditions of abandoned populations living in a primitive state, far removed from any manifestation of civilization»⁵⁴. Schools, alongside other institutions, were envisioned as means of transformation and spiritual uplift, positioning children at the center of «spiritual penetration»⁵⁵. Over time, this process was intended to extend to the adult population, fostering a broader civilizing mission, facilitated in part by the promotion of the Italian language⁵⁶.

Additionally, Regio Decreto Legge n. 1737 of July 24, 1936⁵⁷, was enacted to standardize the educational system across the Italy's colonies. The decree stipulated that oversight of public education would be entrusted to the Ministry of Colonies through the establishment of a school supervisory authority within each colonial government. This administrative structure was responsible for managing and overseeing both public and private schools through the work of a superintendent and a designated inspection and disciplinary team.

As for teaching staff, kindergartens and elementary schools could be entrusted to religious congregations dedicated to education, provided that these

⁵¹ A. Piccioli, *La scuola e le istituzioni educative*, «Gli Annali dell'Africa Italiana», vol. 3, n. 1, 1940, p. 677.

⁵² *Telespresso* No. 19543 from Alfredo Guzzoni to the General Governorship (June 22, 1936), in ACS, MAI, DG Affari Civili, IS, b. 161.

⁵³ During the 1934-1935 academic year, the total number of native students enrolled in both government and private schools reached 3,562, of which only 538 were female (Ministero delle Colonie, *Annuario delle Scuole coloniali. Anno scolastico 1934-1935*, Roma, Angelo Signorelli, 1935, pp. 33-34). Beginning in 1936, the elementary schools established for female native students adopted a predominantly practical approach, offering courses in domestic subjects such as cooking, ironing, laundry, hygiene, and cleaning, in addition to instruction in the Italian language. This type of training clearly reflected an orientation toward preparing young native women for domestic and social roles within their communities (A. Festa, *Le scuole femminili dell'Eritrea*, «I Diritti della Scuola», n. 19, 1937, pp. 300-301).

⁵⁴ A. Festa, *Presupposti e fini dell'azione educativa nei territori dell'A.O.I.*, in Congresso di studi coloniali, *Atti del terzo congresso di studi coloniali (Firenze-Roma, 12-17 aprile 1937)*, 9 vols., Firenze, G.C. Sansoni, 1937, Vol. VI, p. 127 (my translation).

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* (my translation).

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 126-127.

⁵⁷ The decree was converted into Legge n. 268 on January 11, 1937.

congregations employed qualified personnel and operated in accordance with government directives and under the supervision of the educational authorities (art. 3)⁵⁸.

In this context, the educational system in Eritrea experienced significant expansion. Before the war, only 13 government schools operated in the region, serving both Italian and native populations. These schools were located across Asmara, Massawa, Keren, Adi Ugri, Adi Caieh, Ghinda, Assab, Saganeiti, and Agordat⁵⁹. However, between September and December 1936, 25 new primary schools were established: 11 within the former colony's boundaries (Barentù, Gheleb, Mezbà, Senafè, Tessenei, Zazzega, Ad Teclesan, Thiò, Arafali, Decamerè, Mai Adegà) and 14 in Tigray (Adua, Axum, Adigrat, Abbi Addi, Aragurè, Hauzien, Enticciò, Macallè, Quoram, Mai Ceu, Enda Medani Alem, Azbì, Enda Sellassiè, Samrè)⁶⁰. By February 10, 1937, a total of 37 primary schools were in operation, attended by 703 Italian students and 3,400 native students⁶¹.

The data presented in Table 1 further clarify the increase in the number of government schools and enrolled students between 1931 and 1939.

⁵⁸ However, an anonymous article published in 1938 reported that the colonial government, in collaboration with the Ministry, arranged for pre-existing schools in Eritrea from the previous three years to be entrusted to religious orders. Meanwhile, newly established schools, together with secular teaching staff recruited through a public competition organized by the Ministry of Italian East Africa, were to be centrally managed. This approach aimed to facilitate state control and prevent potential internal conflicts (*50 scuole primarie: 7000 allievi in Eritrea*, «L'Italia d'Oltremare», vol. 3, n. 22, 1938, p. 599).

⁵⁹ Ministero delle Colonie, *Annuario delle Scuole coloniali. Anno scolastico 1934-1935*, cit., pp. 33-34. In Eritrea, there were several government schools designated for Italians, including "Principe di Piemonte" in Asmara, "Amedeo di Savoia" in Massawa, "Edoardo de Amicis" in Keren, "Roma" in Adi Caieh, "Armando Diaz" in Adi Ugri, and "Giuseppe Sapeto" in Assab, along with a school in Ghinda. For the native population, there were schools such as "Re Vittorio Emanuele III" in Asmara, "San Giorgio" in Adi Ugri, "San Michele" in Saganeiti, "Salvago Raggi" in Keren, "Fernando Martini" in Massawa, and finally the school in Agordat, all operational during the 1934-35 academic year.

⁶⁰ *L'organizzazione delle scuole primarie*, signed by the R. Direttore Generale Andrea Festa, in ASMAE, EMAI, MAI III, b. 37. This is a typewritten document undated but drafted after 1937.

⁶¹ A. Festa, *4000 alunni nelle scuole primarie dell'Eritrea*, «L'Italia d'Oltremare», vol. 2, n. 4, 1937, p. 21.

Table 1. Number of Government Schools and Enrolled Students in Eritrea (1931-1939)

	1931-32 ⁶²	1933-34 ⁶³	1934-35 ⁶⁴	1936-37 ⁶⁵	1938 ⁶⁶	1939
Government schools for italians	7	6 ⁶⁷	7	6	17	24 ⁶⁸
Students in government schools for italians	872	846	884	777	2554	3045 ⁶⁹
Government schools for natives	5	7 ⁷⁰	6	29	30	32 ⁷¹
Students in government schools for natives	1390	1993	1620	3610	4177	4701 ⁷²

Source: author's organization.

On October 26, 1939, a meeting convened with senior ministerial officials and representatives from the Partito Nazionale Fascista to establish the foundational principles for colonial education, thereby reaffirming the guidelines that had been previously in place. It was decided that education should avoid «imparting knowledge to the natives that could alter their inherent tendencies and characteristics, as well as lead to potentially harmful mental distortions,

⁶² Ministero delle Colonie, *Annuario delle Scuole coloniali. Anno scolastico 1931-1932*, Roma, Angelo Signorelli, 1932, pp. 80-81.

⁶³ *Quadro dei servizi scolastici della Colonia Eritrea*, in ASMAE, EMAI, MAI III, b. 37.

⁶⁴ Ministero delle Colonie, *Annuario delle Scuole coloniali. Anno scolastico 1934-1935*, cit., pp. 33-34.

⁶⁵ Istituto centrale di statistica del Regno d'Italia, *Compendio statistico italiano 1938 – XVII*, Roma, Istituto poligrafico dello stato, 1938, p. 287.

⁶⁶ Piccioli, *La scuola e le istituzioni educative*, «Gli Annali dell'Africa Italiana», cit., pp. 678-679.

⁶⁷ In the academic year 1931-32 and 1934-35, the number of government schools designated for Italians was recorded as seven; however, in 1933-34, it was reported as six, due to the classification of the “Giuseppe Sapeto” elementary school in Assab as a school for native students in that year. In the sources concerning the year 1931-32 and 1934-35, this same school was instead classified as a school for Italians. This suggests that, prior to 1937, when racial laws were implemented, there was no strict distinction between schools for Italians and those for native students. Indeed, although the “Giuseppe Sapeto” elementary school is categorized as Italian in 1934-35, all registered students were Ethiopian, with no Italian students enrolled (Ministero delle Colonie, *Annuario delle Scuole coloniali. Anno scolastico 1934-1935*, cit., pp. 33-34).

⁶⁸ a) *Scuole elementari per nazionali dell'Eritrea al 31/12/1939*, in ASMAE, EMAI, MAI III, b. 37. This is a table attached to the report titled *Le scuole dell'Eritrea*, previously referenced.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ Following the same reasoning as in note no. 66, the number of government schools for native students should not be considered as seven, as indicated in the Table 1, but rather six, due to the classification of the “Giuseppe Sapeto” elementary school in Assab.

⁷¹ b) *Scuole di stato per indigeni eritrei*, in ASMAE, EMAI, MAI III, b. 37. This refers to a table attached to the report titled *Le scuole dell'Eritrea*, previously cited.

⁷² *Ibid.*

especially in the political domain»⁷³. The primary aim was to train individuals «capable of performing auxiliary roles in the fields of administration and agriculture, and to enhance the distinctive features of local craftsmanship»⁷⁴. The curriculum would emphasize an adequate understanding of the Italian language and the acquisition of practical skills, tailored to the specific territorial contexts. Additionally, the importance of maintaining oversight over private schools operated by missionaries was underscored⁷⁵. Supporting this view, Giuseppe Bottai emphasized in his article written in 1939 that education should instill in the local population an awareness of their responsibilities, both «as enhancers of the Empire's economy» and «as its defenders», thereby highlighting the alignment between educational goals and the broader political and social objectives of the Fascist regime⁷⁶.

3. *Secondary school*

Regarding education for Italian students, Giacomo de Martino, the governor of Eritrea from 1916 to 1919, emphasized in his 1916 circular the urgent need for more effective intervention, given the disparity between the educational resources available in the colony and those in Italy.

In Italy, beyond the school and family, the supreme factor of education and culture is the environment in which a child continuously lives: readings, events, examples of lived experiences, lectures, theaters, newspapers, daily practice with more educated individuals, and the feeling of emulation—all of these, along with other factors, cooperate with the family and school to equip the soul and mind with the elements that constitute the education of civilized individuals. [...] In the colony, this is not the case. For a child attending school for the first time, having previously lived in the unrestricted freedom of the fields or in the streets, in constant contact with the indigenous population, and in an environment where, necessarily, the educational elements that are abundant in the homeland are lacking, it is essential that their soul and mind be fully formed or even rebuilt⁷⁷.

According to De Martino, it was essential that the commitment of educational personnel in the colonies be accompanied by «a firmer unity of direction and a more vibrant modernity of method»⁷⁸, objectives that could only be achieved through an active involvement of the government and the authorities

⁷³ *Scuole per sudditi coloniali*, Report by Attilio Teruzzi, (Rome, November 22, 1939), in ACS, MAI, DG Affari Civili, IS, b. 162 (my translation).

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* (my translation).

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ G. Bottai, *La scuola fascista nell'Africa Italiana*, «L'Impero illustrato», vol. 1, n. 9, 1939, p. 3 (my translation).

⁷⁷ *Pubblica Istruzione*, cit. (my translation).

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* (my translation).

responsible for overseeing the schools. Furthermore, the importance of schools as vital instruments for promoting and safeguarding national identity within the colonies was emphasized⁷⁹.

In this context, the demand expressed by families residing in the colony for an education that matched the specificities of colonial environment became clearly evident⁸⁰. The absence of a local higher education institution forced families to send their children to Italy, which created various difficulties. Young students were removed from their social and familial environments, and upon returning to the colony after their studies, they often found it challenging to readjust to local life⁸¹.

This need for renewal took shape with the establishment of educational institutions tailored to the colonial context. The first secondary school in Eritrea was founded in Asmara around 1916 and received official recognition through the Decreto Luogotenenziale of October 14, 1917. This decree governed the organization and operation of the school, which was designed to provide higher education for the children of Italians residing in the colony. The teaching staff was provided by assigning teachers from the ranks of middle schools in Italy, made available to the Colony by the government, and selected by the Ministry of Colonies upon the recommendation of the Ministry of Public Instruction.

The *Scuola Tecnica* underwent multiple transformations to meet the demands of the time. In the 1923-24 academic year, following the Riforma Gentile, it was discontinued and replaced by a *Scuola Complementare* and an *Istituto Tecnico Inferiore*. Later, by gubernatorial decree in 1925, the *Scuola Complementare* was restructured as a *Scuola Commerciale*, offering a four-year curriculum aimed at training local accountants and entrepreneurs⁸². In addition to the technical courses, which included bookkeeping, accounting, and commodity science, the curriculum also incorporated Arabic and English languages instruction. In the 1932-33 academic year, courses were introduced at the *Istituto Tecnico Commerciale* and the *Liceo Scientifico*. This initiative

⁷⁹ In a colonial context perceived as less civilized compared to the motherland, schools did not merely serve a purely educational function; they also acted as instruments of cultural dissemination, intended to guide and align the consciousness of young Italians. This perspective was echoed in the reflections of Camillo De Camillis, who asserted: «I will reiterate to them that the issue of public education, which in the motherland constitutes only one aspect of the social activity of public administration, assumes far greater importance in the colonies, where addressing it effectively represents an act of high political prudence and, at the same time, a duty toward those who, far from their homeland, work for its greatness and prosperity» (*Funzionamento della Scuola Tecnica*, Circular from the Direzione affari civili del Governo dell'Eritrea, signed by De Camillis, [Asmara, January 12, 1918], in ASDMAE, EMAI, AE, b. 852) (my translation).

⁸⁰ *Istanza*, typewritten, addressed to the Governor of the Colony, signed by various heads of families residing in Eritrea (Asmara, January 31, 1914), in ASMAE, EMAI, AE, b. 558.

⁸¹ A letter attached to the *Istanza*, typewritten and signed by Allano Antonio (Asmara, February 4, 1914), in ASMAE, EMAI, AE, b. 558.

⁸² *Le RR. Scuole medie di Asmara* (Asmara, February 20, 1937), signed by Giorgio Brunetti, in ASMAE, EMAI, MAI III, b. 37.

aimed to provide residents of the colony the opportunity to continue their education up to the pre-university level⁸³. However, due to low enrollment, the *Liceo Scientifico* was suspended after the first year for lack of students and was only resumed in the 1934-35 academic year, before being permanently closed in the 1935-36 academic year⁸⁴.

The introduction of Italian racial legislation in 1937 led to circumstances that prompted colonists to move their families to the colonies. This phenomenon led to an increase in the Italian population residing in the region, with a total of 165,267 Italian civilians recorded in the spring of 1939, compared to approximately 12 million Africans. The majority of the colonists, totaling 72,408, lived in Eritrea, making up 43.8% of the overall population⁸⁵. Specifically, Asmara experienced a significant increase in its Italian population, which grew from 3,500 in 1934 to 48,000 in 1939. In parallel, the native population rose from 12,000 to 36,000, thereby altering the demographic ratio between Italians and the local inhabitants⁸⁶.

This demographic growth profoundly impacted the educational system, necessitating a restructuring of secondary schools in the colony to meet the new demands of expanding Italian community. In response to these dynamics, the *R. Liceo-Ginnasio* “Ferdinando Martini” was established alongside the *Istituto Tecnico*⁸⁷, sanctioned by the Decreto Ministeriale of July 1, 1937. In the 1938-39 academic year, secondary schools registered a total of 811 students, marking a significant increase compared to the 200 students in 1936-37. Additionally, the *R. Istituto Tecnico* “Vittorio Bottego”, organized into two sections—commercial and surveying—was established by the Decreto Ministeriale of July 1, 1937. In addition to offering the curriculum mandated for corresponding Italian institutions, it included instruction in local languages and customs, with the aim of preparing students for roles in administrative and technical sectors. The basic course, lasting four years and common to both specializations, provided access to the advanced courses, which were also four years in duration. Upon completion of the program and passing the state examinations, students received diplomas as commercial experts and accountants or as surveyors. Furthermore, in the 1939-40 academic year, a *R. Ginnasio Inferiore* was established in Decamerè, alongside a *Istituto Magistrale* in Asmara⁸⁸.

⁸³ A. Festa, *L'istruzione elementare in Eritrea*, «Annali dell'istruzione elementare», 1933, vol. 8, n. 3, p. 234.

⁸⁴ *Le scuole dell'Eritrea*, cit.

⁸⁵ Podestà, *Emigrazione e colonizzazione in Libia e Africa orientale*, cit., p. 40.

⁸⁶ Id., *Mito e realtà del progetto demografico*, cit., p. 202.

⁸⁷ *Le scuole dell'Eritrea*, cit.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

Table 2 provides a clear representation of the number of students and the changes in the names of the secondary schools in Eritrea during the period from 1916 to 1939⁸⁹.

Table 2. Evolution of the number of students in higher schools in Eritrea (1916-1939)

Academic Year	School Name	N. Students	Academic Year	School Name	N. Students
1916-1917 ⁹⁰	Scuola Tecnica	57	1932-1933	Istituto tecnico inferiore	74
1917-1918 ⁹¹	Scuola Tecnica	73		Scuola commerciale (3 classes)	27
1919-1920 ⁹²	Scuola Tecnica	95		Istituto tecnico commerciale (1 class)	13
1920-1921	Scuola Tecnica	97		Liceo scientifico (1 class)	4
1921-1922	Scuola Tecnica	89		Total	118
1922-1923	Scuola Tecnica	73	1933-1934	Istituto tecnico inferiore	110
1923-1924	Istituto tecnico inferiore	50		Scuola commerciale (3 classes)	20
	Scuola complementare	19		Istituto tecnico commerciale (1 class)	25
	Total	69		Total	155

⁸⁹ To compile the table detailing the number of students and the types of secondary schools in Eritrea from 1916 to 1939, I primarily consulted the document titled *Alunni iscritti alle RR. Scuole Medie di Asmara negli anni scolastici dal 1919-1920 al 1936-1937 XV*. The data for the years 1916-1919 and 1937-1939 were drawn from other documented sources, as indicated. Additionally, within the same collection, I encountered another document titled *Alunni iscritti alle RR. Scuole Medie di Asmara 1927-1937*, which presents slightly different data. Unfortunately, there is no available information regarding the number of students attending secondary schools for the academic year 1937-1938.

⁹⁰ *Scuola Tecnica di Asmara. Dati relativi ai risultati avuti durante l'anno scolastico 1916-17 per 1° corso tecnico*, typewritten document without a date of drafting or signature, written after 1917, in ACS, MAI, DG Affari Civili, IS, b. 161.

⁹¹ G. Amadeo, *La R. Scuola Tecnica di Asmara nell'anno scolastico 1917-18. Relazione finale*, typewritten document signed by G. Amadeo, the director of the R. Scuola Tecnica of Asmara (Asmara, July 31, 1918), in ASMAE, EMAI, MAI III, b. 36.

⁹² *Alunni iscritti alle RR. Scuole Medie di Asmara negli anni scolastici dal 1919-1920 al 1936-1937 XV*, typedwritten, signed by Giorgio Brunetti, headmaster of the Scuole Medie of Asmara (Asmara, February 20, 1937), in ASMAE, EMAI, MAI III, b. 37. This document is attached to the document titled *Le RR. Scuole Medie di Asmara*, previously mentioned.

1924-1925	Istituto tecnico inferiore	34	1934-1935	Istituto tecnico inferiore	138
	Scuola complementare	19		Scuola commerciale (3 classes)	9
	Total	53		Istituto Tecnico commerciale (1 class)	26
1925-1926	Istituto tecnico inferiore	33		Liceo scientifico (1 class)	8
	Scuola commerciale	23		Total	181
	Total	58	1935-1936	Istituto tecnico inferiore	122
1926-1927	Istituto tecnico inferiore	44		Istituto tecnico commerciale	27
	Scuola commerciale	34		Liceo scientifico (2 classes)	10
	Total	78		Total	159
1927-1928	Istituto tecnico inferiore	42	1936-1937	Istituto tecnico inferiore	74
	Scuola commerciale	44		Istituto tecnico commerciale (3 classes)	9
	Total	86		Ginnasio	107
1928-1929	Istituto tecnico inferiore	44		Liceo classico (1 class)	10
	Scuola commerciale	54		Total	200
	Total	98	1938-1939 ⁹³	Ginnasio	397
1929-1930	Istituto tecnico inferiore	47		Liceo classico	73
	Scuola commerciale	53		Istituto tecnico commerciale e per Geometri di Asmara	341
	Total	100		Total	811

⁹³ Piccioli, *La scuola e le istituzioni educative*, cit., p. 677.

1930-1931	Istituto tecnico inferiore	47	1939 ⁹⁴	Liceo-Ginnasio di Asmara	467
				Istituto magistrale superiore di Asmara	44
	Scuola commerciale	52		Istituto tecnico commerciale e per Geometri di Asmara	408
	Total	99		Ginnasio inferiore di Decamerè	55
				Total	974

Source: author's organization

On June 10, 1940, Italy's entry into the Second World War set off a period of profound transformation for the educational system in Eritrea. On February 22, 1941, an order was issued to close all schools in Asmara in response to the deteriorating wartime situation⁹⁵.

During the British occupation, numerous school buildings deemed strategically significant were requisitioned for military purposes, removing them from the control of the Italian administration. The secondary schools and elementary schools in Asmara were converted into shelters for refugees from Gondar, while the *Istituto Tecnico* became the headquarters for the air forces⁹⁶. However, towards the end of 1942, the new British administration took control of all schools intended for the Eritrean population, previously managed by the Italian School Superintendency, reorganizing and directly overseeing them through a dedicated Education Department⁹⁷.

Conclusion

The analysis of the Italian schools established in Eritrea between 1890 and 1941 reveals a complex interplay of educational policies, socio-economic dynamics, and broader colonial strategies. Demographic transformations, the

⁹⁴ *Servizi scolastici dell'Eritrea alla data del 31/12/1939*, in ASMAE, EMAI, MAI III, b. 37. This is a document attached to the report titled *Le scuole dell'Eritrea*, previously mentioned.

⁹⁵ Carini, La Cordara, *Storia della scuola italiana in Eritrea*, cit., p. 100.

⁹⁶ *La scuola italiana dell'Eritrea sotto l'occupazione britannica*, in ACS, MAI, DG Affari Civili, IS, b. 152. This is a typewritten document without the name of the author, signature, or date, but likely written after 1952.

⁹⁷ Carini, La Cordara, *Storia della scuola italiana in Eritrea*, cit., p. 101.

evangelical initiatives of missionaries, and the growing interest in the education of both the local populations and Italians contributed to shaping an educational system that, although initially poorly conceived, evolved under the influence of colonial domination objectives. This system ultimately fostered a colonial society where education served not only as a means of cultural formation but also as a ground for identity negotiation among the local population.

The educational system that was implemented mirrored deep structural inequalities, while simultaneously providing a space of opportunity for the growing demand for education among the indigenous population. This duality exposed an underlying tension between forces of assimilation and resistance. In this framework, schooling served a dual purpose: as a tool for social control and training oriented toward consolidating colonial authority, yet also as a place for the development of potential. This raises critical questions regarding the relationship between knowledge and power, and the ambivalent role of education as either a mechanism for emancipation or a means of subjugation.