



THE POLITICS OF ACCESS: UNIVERSITY EDUCATION AND NATION-BUILDING IN NIGERIA, 1948-2000

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Towards Educational Reform: The Cold War, Decolonization, and the Carnegie Corporation, 1952–60

Educational development is imperative and urgent. It must be treated as a national emergency, second only to war. It must move with the momentum of a revolution.

– S.O. AWOKOYA, 1952

Introduction

Nationalists' campaigns for colonial reform and independence in the 1950s resulted in two constitutional reviews that, for the first time in the country's history, placed education under the control of Nigerian politicians. While the South used that opportunity to pursue universal education policies at the primary and secondary education levels, the North was rather slow. The educational gap between the two regions thus widened. As Nigeria marched towards independence without the University College of Ibadan (UCI) producing adequate human resources needed for postcolonial economic development, reforming the elitist British educational system became critical. The British resistance to fundamental changes in the early 1950s increasingly eased when the perceived threat of communism in Africa and the politics of decolonization caused them to accept nationalists' aspirations aimed at realigning the country's university education to

address the challenges of economic development and nation-building. It was in the context of promoting those two goals of university education that the Carnegie Corporation of New York came to play a fundamental role in Nigeria's educational development in the 1950s.

This chapter examines the mass education schemes undertaken by the federal and regional governments in the 1950s, the regional rivalries that threatened the Nigerian project, the increasing nationalist agitation for greater access to UCI, and the support of the Carnegie Corporation for tertiary education. It shows how the coalescence of domestic and external forces laid the foundation for the postcolonial governments' determination to use mass university education to reorganize the country's elitist higher education system. Intended to provide full opportunities to all, accelerate economic development, and unify Nigeria's pluralistic society, these policies provide a glimpse of the ways in which education, politics, and societal forces intersected to shape Nigeria's turbulent march to nationhood.

Education in National Politics

Since the introduction of Western education in the 1840s, the educational disparity between the Muslim North and the Christian South had been a potential source of conflict. Although mutual misunderstanding existed between the North and the South, the British maintained peace in the country through a centralized system of administration. Yet, largely due to the diversities of the two areas, the colonial authorities decided to move the country from a unitary to a federal state after the Second World War. The Richards Constitution of 1946 marked the beginning of that shift. The constitution created regional houses of assembly but denied politicians the power to legislate for their own regions.¹ This policy led to regional agitation for administrative autonomy. Because the British imposed this constitution on the regions without consultation, nationalists criticized it and demanded changes that would grant more power to the regional assemblies.

The first attempt at constitutional change occurred in 1950. John Macpherson, who was appointed governor in 1948, yielded to the nationalists' demands for a re-examination of the Richards Constitution by convening a constitutional conference in January 1950 in Ibadan. Delegates

to the conference unanimously agreed on greater regional autonomy and settled for a federal system in which the regions would share power with the central government and have representatives at the national congress. By settling on a federal arrangement, the regions highlighted the ethnic divisions and tensions in the country and demonstrated a unanimous desire to safeguard their sovereignty. This, however, constituted a crucial obstacle to the prospects of building a united nation.

Although the regions agreed on a federal structure, they disagreed on the ratio of representation of each region. Conscious of their disadvantage in terms of Western education, and determined to use their bigger population to counterbalance supposed Southern domination, delegates representing the Northern Region at the Ibadan constitutional conference demanded a 50–50 representation ratio in the central legislature between the North and the South (eastern and western regions). In their defence, Mallam Sani Dingyadi, a spokesperson for the North, admitted that the South feared that the North would dictate policies for the rest of the country if given 50 per cent representation in the House of Representatives.² He stressed, however, that the North would feel the same way if the three regions got equal representation. According to him, since the South had a common religion, with the same standard of education, they were more likely to arrive at a common cause and thus shift the country's balance of power to their advantage. On the other hand, he lamented that

the North has a different religion and different standards of education, so the North must stand alone by itself. Therefore, in any matter of importance one would find the East, West, Lagos ... on one side leaving the North on the other side. Therefore, I do not think it is fair and cannot tolerate it that equal representation should be given to each region. What we would recommend is at least one-half representation for the North and one-half for what I call the South.³

In contrast, Chief Obanikoro, the spokesperson for the Western Region, together with Alvan Ikoku who represented the Eastern Region disagreed, stating that if the North had its way, this would amount to “placing the fate of the two regions at the mercy of the North.”⁴ They recognized that

“the population of the North is larger than that of the other two regions. But if the principle is one of federation and not of domination, the basis of representation at the centre must be regional.”⁵ Apparently, the fear of domination, stirred by regional educational disparity, manifested itself prominently for the first time in Nigeria’s history. However, at the end of the debate, the preference of the North prevailed without which the Emir of Zaria had threatened to “ask for separation from the rest of Nigeria.”⁶

Based on the agreements reached at the constitutional convention, the Macpherson Constitution emerged in 1951. Unlike the preceding constitutions, the 1951 document came into being after extensive consultation with the people of Nigeria as a whole. Initiated by Sir John Macpherson, governor-general of Nigeria (1948–54), the constitution established central and regional legislative councils as well as a central executive council for the country.⁷ The regional legislatures legislated only with respect to certain specified areas affecting their regions, namely, agriculture, education (primary and secondary), local government, and public health, while the central legislature was responsible for all other legislative areas. In 1952, elections were conducted, and regional political parties with clear majorities emerged to advocate the course of social and economic advancement for their respective regions. In the eastern region, the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) (which became the National Council of Nigerian Citizens after 1960) dominated the Eastern Region with the Igbo as its major ethnic base. Nnamdi Azikiwe was one of the founding members of the party. The Action Group (AG) emerged in the Western Region, led by Obafemi Awolowo and with its membership mostly from the Yoruba ethnic group. The Northern People’s Congress (NPC), a northern party was led by Ahmadu Bello and was dominated by the Hausa and Fulani ethnic groups.

Education was uppermost in the minds of the newly elected regional leaders who felt that the British had failed to invest in education. According to K.O. Dike, “The nationalist realized that no impression can be made on the colossal ignorance of the country until education, of all types, permeates every sector of the community, and until it is available to the majority of the people.”⁸ The British government refused to introduce mass education schemes, notwithstanding high demand for education. In fact, the British education report in 1951 stated that “while universal primary education is

one of the essential aims of educational policy, it is not the only, nor is it necessarily the most urgent aim.”⁹ The neglect of education was deliberate; colonial authorities did not see education as an investment; otherwise, they would have allocated adequate resources to expand it. The percentage of government investment on education remained low for the greater part of the colonial period. For instance, from 1898 to 1923, expenditure on education was less than 2 per cent of the revenue. While the total revenue for 1923 was £6,509,244, only 1.5 per cent (£100,063) was spent on education. The revenue in 1936 was £6,585.458 but only £231,983 (3.5 per cent) was allocated to education. The cumulated result was that at the outbreak of the Second World War, only 12 per cent of Nigerian children of school age were in schools.¹⁰

Contrary to the educational assumptions of the colonial authorities, nationalists thought of expansion of the system as urgent because they recognized the role of education in the society. Given the popular faith in the power of education as “the motor of social development,” it was understandable, as rightly captured in *Education and Nation Building in Africa*, “why the control and planning of education became, often even before independence[,] a political issue of crucial magnitude.”¹¹ Motivated by the powers granted by the Macpherson Constitution, Obafemi Awolowo, the Action Group leader who won the first election to the Western House of Assembly in 1952, promised free universal primary education. In July of the same year, the minister of education in the region, S.O. Awokoya, presented to the House of Assembly a sessional paper on the region’s educational policy that was a radical departure from the British policy. It insisted on the imperative and urgency of educational expansion, which it hoped should “move with the momentum of a revolution.”¹² Thus the educational policy of the region, which reflected the position of the Action Group, was “one of expansion and reorientation [implying] an all-out expansion of all types of educational institutions [so] that in a few years time, it should be possible to have universal education for all children of school age in the Western Region.”¹³

The bold steps taken by the Action Group government in the west largely influenced the NCNC-led party in the Eastern Region to contemplate a similar policy. In 1953, the region’s minister of education, R.I. Uzoma, articulated only a modest mass education policy, which involved

cost-sharing between the region and the local governments.¹⁴ However, in that year, the NCNC witnessed a leadership overhaul, with Nnamdi Azikiwe replacing Eyo Ita as the leader of the party, while I.U. Akpabio took over from Uzoma as the minister of education. Azikiwe rejected the modest proposal of his predecessor and proposed an eight-year free education plan instead. In 1953, over half a million of the region's children of primary age were in school.¹⁵ In the report of its 1953 mission in Nigeria, the World Bank observed that the "intense and widespread desire in Nigeria for education is encouraging ... [and the] enthusiasm for education in much of Nigeria amounts to a blind faith that schooling ... is a passport to employment and affluence."¹⁶ As the report highlighted,

The people of Nigeria are anxious to live better and hence to produce more goods, in greater variety; they want to become better educated; they show a growing willingness to modify those institutions which hold back economic progress and accept methods of social, economic and political organization which elsewhere have proved conducive to such progress.¹⁷

While the Eastern and Western regions made aggressive attempts at expanding educational opportunities, the North was rather cautious in pushing for expansion. The issue with the North was their general antipathy towards Western education. As noted in chapter 1, missionary control of education through most of the colonial era meant that demands for education and desires for Christianity intersected. The South received the missionaries and their education. The Muslims, who dominated the North, perceived Western education as synonymous with Christianity and therefore resisted it. Most children from ages four to twelve attended compulsory Koranic schools. The influential local authority officials, including the emirs and the chiefs, saw no useful purpose in sending their children to Western educational institutions; indeed, they were afraid it would corrupt them. Thus, while the Koranic schools attracted the vast majority of children, the Western educational institutions in the region remained virtually empty.¹⁸

Unlike other regions, the North did not introduce universal education scheme. The major practical problem confronting the North in terms

of expanding its education program was the inadequate number of teachers and the low entrance of northerners in UCI. Consequently, the region pursued a policy of cautious planning and maximizing efficiency through teacher training while advocating for affirmative action in university admission, which the British rejected. As the Inter-University Council report in 1952 declared, “the college while admitting every woman and northern candidate qualified for university work should resist any proposal to accept or introduce a quota system.” As the report stressed, “a quota system of admission might lower academic standards, not only in terms of quality of the student’s entry but in terms of the work of the staff and students throughout the college. It would damage the college and would not assist the object it was designed to serve.”¹⁹

Commenting on the insufficient supply of university education, the World Bank Mission stressed “that Nigeria needs many times more college graduates than even the most optimistic plans could provide.”²⁰ As the mission recommended, “every effort [should] be made to increase enrolment at the university, presently around 400, as quickly as possible.... At the same time the University College should offer a greater variety of courses ... related more directly to the economic advancement of the Nigerian people than it has been thus far.”²¹ The World Bank echoed the Elliot Commission’s view on the development of higher education in West Africa, which argued that “the need for highly trained Africans is too great to be met in any way other than by training them in their own country.”²² The World Bank report was an indictment of UCI. It added great impetus to the nationalists’ opposition to the limited opportunities provided by UCI and propelled them to agitate for changes in the institution’s admission policies. Though few, if any, educational changes were made immediately, the constitutional changes in 1954 paved the way for a major milestone in Nigeria’s higher education development.

The year 1954 was remarkable in the history of higher education in Nigeria because the Lyttleton Constitution placed legislative power over higher education in the hands of both the federal and regional governments. Named after Oliver Lyttleton, the secretary for the colonies, who chaired the constitutional review committee, the constitution officially fashioned Nigeria into a federation of three regions, with Lagos as the federal capital territory. It defined the relations between the federation and the regions

in the distribution of legislative powers, as outlined in the legislative lists: the Exclusive List (subjects exclusively reserved for the central government), the Residual List (subjects exclusively reserved for the regions), and the Concurrent List (subjects shared by the central and regional governments).²³ Under this constitution, regional governments could legislate on the subject of primary and secondary education, which the constitution placed on the Residual List. In response to these changes, the three regions and Lagos enacted education laws that became the basis for mass education at the primary and secondary school levels.²⁴ In addition, the constitution placed higher education on the Concurrent Legislative List, giving both the central and regional governments authority to establish and run higher education institutions.

In line with the provision of Lyttleton Constitution, the Eastern Region went beyond the pursuit of mass primary and secondary education to initiate plans to establish a university in the region. The government of the region was conscious of the new constitutional powers granted to the regions under the 1954 Lyttleton Constitution, inspired by the World Bank's advice on the need to expand the opportunities for university education, and was still disappointed with the elitist nature of UCI. Consequently, the region seized the moment and began to push for the establishment of a regional university. Nnamdi Azikiwe, who had been a vocal critic of UCI, and who had since 1920 nursed the ambition of establishing a Nigerian university, championed the idea. Azikiwe led a delegation to Europe and America to attract investors to the Eastern Region and to seek the advice and backing on the feasibility of establishing a university in eastern Nigeria. He also introduced a motion in the Eastern House of Assembly in May 1955 seeking to create the University of Nigeria to meet the needs where UCI had failed. As Azikiwe stated,

Such a higher institution of learning should not only be cultural, according to the classical concepts of universities, but it should also be vocational in its objective and Nigerian in content. We should not offer any apologies for making such a progressive move. After all, we must do for ourselves what others hesitate to do for us.²⁵

In addition, the proposed bill called for the establishment of twenty diploma-conferring institutes. Azikiwe reasoned that if the institutes were organized to operate *pari passu* with the university, the region would have embarked upon “an historic renaissance in the fields of academic, cultural, professional and technical education on the same lines as the leading countries of the world.”²⁶ In formulating the policy of the region for the establishment of the University of Nigeria, Azikiwe noted that the government was obliged to make a radical departure from the restrictive practices and long-held elitist traditions of UCI. In contrast to UCI, the proposed university was intended to achieve the following goals, as Azikiwe later recollected:

It will not only blend professional cum vocational higher education, but it will create an atmosphere of social equality between the two types of students. It will adapt the “land-grant college” philosophy of higher education with the classical tradition in an African environment. It will cater for a larger student body to specialize on a variety of courses, whilst maintaining the highest academic standards. It will not restrict the number of its students purely on the basis of the potential absorption of its graduates into vacant jobs within the territorial limits of Nigeria. It will spread its activities over a wide range of fields of human endeavor to enable the average student to specialize on the basis of his aptitude.²⁷

The idea of a university in the Eastern Region, dedicated to accomplish the above objectives, was unique and revolutionary because it sought to remove the obstacles that had hindered access to university education. In a sense, it was a desire for mass university education, educational expediency, and nationalism – coupled with Azikiwe’s connections – that fundamentally drove the push for a new university. Azikiwe and other supporters of the American system, such as Ita Eyo, Nwafor Orizu, Mbonu Ojike, and others, received university training in the United States and were united in their opposition to the British elitist system. Apollos Nwauwa has shown how the influence of American-trained university graduates facilitated the establishment of universities in Africa, including Nigeria.²⁸ These

supporters of American-style higher education did not stop when UCI was established in 1948. Rather, they continued as crusaders for American practical education, as contrasted to the British literary tradition. For instance, Professor Eyo Ita, a veteran teacher and a former leader of the opposition in the Eastern House of Assembly, supported the idea of establishing a vocational university education as obtainable in the American universities to challenge UCI's elitism. He predicted that a day would come when all states in Nigeria would own a university.²⁹

Attraction to the U.S. system of education among American-educated Nigerians was one of the major reasons for the post-Second World War migration of hundreds of Nigerians to the United States. At the same time, their bias in favour of American educational ideals and radical nationalism contributed to the dislike of both the British and the British-educated Nigerians toward American education and American-educated Nigerians.³⁰ Nevertheless, on 18 May 1955, the Eastern House of Assembly passed into law the bill establishing the University of Nigeria.³¹ The first practical financial step towards putting into effect the plan contained in the bill was the government's decision to direct the Eastern Nigeria Marketing Board to lay aside £500,000 annually from 13 December 1955 to the end of 1964. This fund was expected to amount to £5 million by the end of 1964.³² On paper, the University of Nigeria was born in 1955, and, as the region continued to raise funds for the proposed university, the politics of the Cold War and decolonization created circumstances that made broader higher education reform unavoidable.

Postwar Nigeria

The postwar world was a remarkable period in the history of Africa, a period when international events commingled with domestic situation to produce changes not only in the political scene but also in educational arena. Between 1945 and 1949, Soviet-backed communist governments came to power in some eastern European countries such as Poland, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria, Albania, Yugoslavia, and Romania. Joseph Stalin's policy of spreading communism globally threatened Western democracies, most notably the United States and Britain. The Cold War

was raging and the Western and the Eastern blocs both looked to influence events in Africa, a continent they considered a strategic ally in their ideological confrontation.³³ On the domestic front, nationalists, angered by the failure of the colonial powers to fulfill their wartime promises, coupled with acute food shortages and unemployment in the colonies, had intensified their demands for social change. In the 1950s, the politics of decolonization and the Cold War helped to link the interests of Carnegie, Britain, and Nigeria for higher education, producing a policy shift in which the push for mass university education was now conceived as a tool in facilitating both socio-economic development and nation-building. The resulting Anglo-American-Nigerian collaboration in Nigerian higher education expansion produced a blueprint in 1960 that shaped the direction of postcolonial higher education in Nigeria.

In the context of the Cold War and decolonization, Britain sought to crack down on the radical and rebellious Nigerian nationalists, who they suspected received support from communist governments, as well as Nigerians travelling to communist countries for higher education studies. The “fear of cold war communist intervention in Africa and a determination to resist the ‘extremist’ nationalists,” as Roger Fieldhouse notes, “created a very different atmosphere in the West African territories after 1948.”³⁴ Communist-inclined Nigerian nationalists saw communism as a powerful tool in ending colonial rule and as a model in building a West Africa Union.³⁵ The growing conviction to fight colonial repressive measure more forcefully lay at the centre of the formation of the Zikist Movement in Nigeria. Newspapers such as the *West African Pilot* and the *Daily Comet* openly supported the workers strike led by Michael Imoudu in 22 June 1945 and attracted the wrath of colonial authorities who banned them. Other leftist elements in Nigeria, such Nduka Eze, Unasu Amosu, Osita Agwuna, Raji Abdallah, Ogedegbe Macaulay, and J.J. Odufuwa, served jail terms for engaging in what colonial authorities regarded as subversive activities.

In *Britain, Leftist Nationalists and the Transfer of Power in Nigeria, 1945–1965*, Tijani discusses the activities of leftist groups in Nigeria who received financial support from the Eastern bloc and the British measures to suppress them.³⁶ Tijani argues that the Criminal Code Ordinance in 1950, which criminalized seditious activities, was occasioned by the Zikists’

“Call for a Revolution,” a call to Nigerians to defect from the colonial security forces, the discovery of weapons at the Kaduna and Lagos offices of the Zikist Movement, and “the increasing volume of communist revolutionary newsletters, and funding of leftists-led trade union organizations by the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU).”³⁷ So threatened were the colonial authorities in Nigeria by communism that they banned thirty-three books, pamphlets, and other publications that carried communist propaganda in early 1955 and clamped down on Nduka Eze and those associated with the Scholarship Board.³⁸ Strict conditions were imposed on Nigerians travelling to communist countries for studies or conferences as nationals of communist countries were denied visas to Nigeria.³⁹ The fear of communism made future cooperation between the British and Nigerian elites in educational issues inevitable. Yet, while the British continued to suppress communist elements in Nigeria, Carnegie Corporation, inspired by a desire to contain the spread of communist ideas in Africa, began a campaign for educational expansion in Nigeria.

The Cold War and decolonization presented Carnegie Corporation with an opportunity to push for the reform of the elitist British educational system aimed at extending American social values in the emerging African nations. The corporation believed that this approach would be a strategic tool in forestalling a potential Soviet influence in the continent, as well as challenging Britain’s power in Africa by offering Africans an alternative, more inclusive higher education system. Carnegie’s interest in educational expansion in Africa was reinforced after the end of the Second World War as a strategic tool in successfully fighting the Cold War. America’s largest foundations, the Carnegie Corporation, the Rockefeller Foundation, and the Ford Foundation, had assisted the United States in furthering its interests worldwide during the ideological war with the Soviet Union. These foundations emphasized education by funding programs linking the educational systems of the new African nations to the “values, modus operandi, and institutions of the United States.”⁴⁰ This was part of the United States’ Cold War agenda, designed to assist in the process of decolonizing European colonies in Africa in order to establish strong socio-economic and political ties with emerging countries in Africa. Failing to do that, Carnegie thought that the USSR, intent on internationalizing communism, would establish a stronghold in Africa.

Alan Pifer was a staff member of the Carnegie Corporation's international program called British Dominions and Colonies Program (BDC), who championed the course of educational expansion in Nigeria on behalf of the corporation. He disbursed funds to help the British colonies in Africa expand their educational facilities and opportunities. Established in the 1920s with \$10 million as its budget, the BDC program aimed at providing assistance to British overseas colonies. Before the Second World War, the program focused on bringing Africans to the United States, an approach that failed to address human resource shortages in the continent. After the war, Carnegie decided to change this policy. With close to \$2 million in accumulated revenue, Carnegie decided to devote greater attention to British colonies in Africa, believing "that the speed and nature of developments in the British Colonies afford opportunities now for assistance from a private Foundation which could be particularly productive and timely."⁴¹ Pifer was the man to accomplish Carnegie's objectives.

Pifer joined Carnegie in 1953 after working as the executive secretary of the U.S. Educational Commission in Britain and administering the Fulbright Program of educational exchange for five years. He had travelled extensively to Africa. As I have argued elsewhere, Pifer's "years in the Fulbright Program helped him forge a close relationship with top colonial officials in London, and through his trips to Africa, he had not only made friends with colonial officials but also garnered greater understanding of both colonial politics and nationalists' aspirations."⁴² Pifer believed that "American aid, if wisely given, cannot be regarded as anything but beneficial – indeed urgent.... Education, of course is the key. There is no aspect of African life which is not affected by it."⁴³

To discuss the steps needed to intervene in Africa's educational development, Carnegie Corporation officials met on 11 May 1954 in New York. In attendance were Alan Pifer and Steve Stackpole, executive assistants in the British Dominions and Colonies Program; Walter Adams, secretary of the Inter-University Council; and Sally Chilvers, secretary of the Colonial Social and Science Research Council.⁴⁴ At the meeting, Pifer and Stackpole stated that the focus of Carnegie assistance in the British colonies would henceforth be universities, university colleges, and research institutions, with the intention of changing British policy on higher education. Pifer specifically proposed that the first step toward amending these

reports was to conduct a broad survey of higher education in Africa, preferably in Nigeria. In a memo to staff, Pifer explained the reasons why he chose Nigeria for the study:

It was realized, however, that a general study of all colonial education was impracticable. Nigeria, therefore, as the largest, most important territory and the one with possibly the greatest likelihood of future disorganization in its higher education system was selected as the place where the study should be made.⁴⁵

In a letter to Stackpole, Pifer wrote that his “own view, shared by Adams, is that too many people have been resting on the Asquith and Elliot Reports for too long. A lot has happened in the African colonies in the past ten years.”⁴⁶ He advocated a review of the Asquith Commission with a view to determining UCI’s relevance to the Nigeria’s professional, agricultural, technical, and general education.⁴⁷

Pifer used every opportunity he had to pursue this project. For instance, between 16 and 18 June 1955, when the principals of six Asquith university institutions, including UCI, met informally at a conference at the University College of the West Indies, Jamaica, to re-evaluate the principle of elitism that the Asquith Commission had endorsed, Pifer used the forum to advance his reform agenda. At the end of the conference, it was decided that alternative patterns of higher education, such as the idea of “mass” university education in Puerto Rico and the democratization of access to higher education in the United States, were possible models for British colonies in Africa.⁴⁸ The delegates concurred on the need to set up a commission to study strategies to expand education in Africa, beginning with Nigeria. The pact reached at the Jamaica Conference and the proposal to establish a university in eastern Nigeria according to the American pattern threatened the elitist British system of higher education.

Resistant to any attempt to reform British higher education policy, Dan Maxwell, the assistant secretary of the Inter-University Council, informed Pifer in October 1955 that the colonial office had suspended the implementation of the Jamaica resolution. The reasons he gave were as follows: events in the colonies were moving so fast that the study might not keep up with them; the Asquith principles should not be reviewed but

instead interpreted, modified, and applied to each region; the best people to conduct the study would not spare the time for it; a delegation from the University of London had gone to West Africa to assess the capacity of the universities to cope with engineering courses; and the premier of the Eastern Region had proposed the establishment of the University of Nigeria. As Maxwell concluded, “until the results of these delegations and discussions have been made known and digested, the review idea has been put into cold storage.”⁴⁹ Though the British shelved the idea of reforming the prevailing system, Pifer did not give up. He continued to press on, albeit diplomatically. His cause received a boost as more and more people in Nigeria questioned whether the existing higher educational facilities were suitable to the needs of developing country such as Nigeria.

Of all the regions, the North was most apprehensive of colonial educational shortcomings. That trepidation was demonstrated in 1956 when Anthony Enahoro, a southerner and a member of the House of Representatives, called for Nigeria’s independence in 1956. Northern political leaders rejected it. They were afraid of perceived southern domination due to their educational lead. In refusing the motion, Ahmadu Bello, the Sarduna of Sokoto, stated that the northerners “were late in assimilating Western education yet within a short time we will catch up with [other] Regions, and share their lot.... We want to be realistic and consolidate our gains.”⁵⁰ Indeed, the shortages of highly educated people in Nigeria provided the context in which Nigerian leaders sought to reform the educational system, especially in 1957 when the demands for independence reached a crescendo. In that year, a constitutional conference held in London, among other things, created a ‘national government,’ with elections scheduled for 11 December 1959 and a target date for independence tentatively scheduled for April 1960. Independence meant that Nigerians would have to take over the top bureaucratic positions previously held by expatriates, mostly British. As many expatriate civil servants consequently began to leave the country due to impending independence, labour shortages loomed for Nigeria’s would-be leaders. Given this fact, the national government under Balewa contemplated measures to train Nigerians in preparation for the challenges of independence.

In pursuit of the Nigerianization policy, the national government appointed an officer specifically to push for the training and recruitment

of Nigerians for public service positions.⁵¹ In addition, the government selected a special committee of the House of Representatives in March 1958, which commented harshly on previous plans to train Nigerians: on unwarranted concessions accorded to expatriate officers, lack of progress in placing Nigerians in senior posts, and insufficient production of graduates from UCI.⁵² Nevertheless, the government continued to train Nigerians, particularly for senior civil service positions, through the awarding of scholarships. As a result, the government increased the number of scholarships for Nigerian students to 101 in the UK, 44 in the United States, and one in India.⁵³

The regional governments were equally engaged in efforts to train high-level personnel abroad in readiness for independence. The government of the Western Region sponsored 312 students from western Nigeria for training abroad, while about 2,639 private students studied in overseas higher institutions.⁵⁴ The government spent about £140,000 annually to support these students. Similarly, the Eastern Region awarded overseas post-secondary scholarships to 549 students, while 735 private students studied abroad.⁵⁵ The Northern Region did not make similar efforts. Although the region nursed the ambition of establishing a university, it was handicapped by an insufficient number of applicants due to its long antipathy to Western education. Sir John Lockwood, the permanent secretary in the federal Ministry of Education, recounted that as far back as 1957, "the Premier and the Ministry of Education of the Northern Region had left me under no illusions about their hopes. They told me at Kaduna last January [1956] that as soon as there were enough potential candidates from their region, they would wish to have a university (of their own)."⁵⁶ Nevertheless, the massive educational advances made by the governments in the Eastern and Western Regions, coupled with generous scholarship awards, ensured that either southerners or expatriates dominated federal and regional government jobs, and perhaps the same applied to jobs in the private sector. The situation was indeed very disturbing because, as a Nigerianization officer put it:

It is believed that only one per cent of the staff of the (federal) service is of Northern origin, and it is doubtful whether, among the senior posts, the percentage is as high as this. The size of the

problem can be estimated when it is realized that Northerners constitute approximately 55 percent of the population of the federation.⁵⁷

Since southerners filled the available posts in the federal civil service, northerners interpreted 'Nigerianization' as synonymous with 'southernization.' In response, the Public Service Commission of the Northern Region initiated a 'Northernization' policy in December 1957 as a counterpoise to the 'Nigerianization' policy. The policy stated that "if a qualified Northerner is available, he is given priority in recruitment; if no Northerner is available, an expatriate may be recruited or a non-Northerner on contract terms."⁵⁸ The policy was intended to help fill the public service in the North with northerners by discriminating against southerners, who were, indeed, the targets. Headlines like "Northernization: More Southerners Sacked," dominated daily newspapers in the South, which had harsh words for the policy.⁵⁹ The discomfort and fear in the North, arising from the educational imbalance between it and the South, underscore the Northernization policy. Because the regions were autonomous entities, the central government was too weak to prevent the resulting bitter regional competition and rivalry. As Robin Hallett noted:

The relations of the Regions one with another are haunted by fear and suspicion; the North apprehensive of the South hurries forward its policy of Northernization; the South is half-afraid, half-contemptuous, and almost wholly ignorant of the North. Then look how weak the Federal Government is.⁶⁰

The artificial division of Nigeria into three regions with substantial regional autonomy satisfied colonial administrative strategy but compromised the chances of building one nation out of the various antagonistic nations inhabiting Nigeria. Some colonial officials recognized this problem. Sir Alan Burns, Nigeria's governor-general from 1942 to 1943, noted that "there is no Nigerian nation.... The very name of Nigeria was invented by the British to describe a country inhabited by a medley of formerly warring tribes with no common culture, and united only in so far as they are governed by a single power."⁶¹ Also, Lord Milverton (formerly Arthur Richards), Nigeria's

governor-general from 1943 to 1948, maintained that Nigeria was more of a geographical expression than a nation.⁶² In addition, an American social scientist, Martin Kilson, who conducted research on the rise of nationalism in Nigeria, concluded that “the chances for a viable, united Nigerian nation-state are rather slim indeed.”⁶³ Educational disparity between the North and South further worsened that chance. The importance, therefore, to build a united nation through expansion of education was one that Pifer understood. During his visit to Nigeria, Pifer realized that the major source of regional tension was located in the North, a region he noted that was “educationally and economically the most backward part of the country and yet with its eighteen million people holding the whip hand politically over the Eastern and Western regions.”⁶⁴ Unresolved regional tensions, Pifer warned, would undermine national security and potentially “give the Russians their first big chance in Africa.”⁶⁵ He stressed that the prospect of a cohesive and strong Nigeria presented “the few counterbalancing forces” against the Soviet Union.⁶⁶

From 1954, when the Carnegie Corporation held its first meeting on the subject of reforming higher education in the British colonies, pressures on the British government to expand opportunities for university education continued to grow. When the principals of university colleges in the British colonies met again in Salisbury in 1957 to discuss the type of university required in rapidly developing countries, they favoured the U.S. comprehensive system. Yet, Pifer knew that for his reform agenda to succeed, he needed British cooperation before Nigeria’s independence because he was uncertain of succeeding in reforming the system after independence. Moreover, involving the British would ensure that Nigerians accept the American system of education that was less respected by the British-educated Nigerians. Thus, Pifer continued to push for Anglo-American cooperation.

The increasing fear of communist infiltration in Nigeria, the need to maintain friendly relations with a postcolonial Nigeria, and Pifer’s consistent push for educational reform, coupled with Carnegie’s readiness to provide financial support to conduct a study of Nigeria’s educational needs, caused the British to allow a re-examination of their educational tradition. Sir Christopher Cox, educational advisor to the Colonial Office, after discussing the proposed study with Carnegie Corporation, committed Britain

to the idea of holding an Anglo-American conference to discuss further cooperation between the UK and the United States in providing assistance to former British colonies in Africa that had achieved independence and to British colonies that were about to achieve independence. Pifer's resolve had been manifested in his consistent impact at conferences and his many informal meetings and communications with colonial administrators and educators since 1954. In addition, the United States had put pressure on Britain in general to speed up decolonization as part of its Cold War agenda.⁶⁷ Thus, the British agreement to hold a conference at which the specifics of educational reform were to be discussed was a turning point in Anglo-American participation in Nigeria's educational reform.

Carnegie consequently sponsored the Greenbrier Conference, which met from 21 to 25 May 1958, at White Springs, West Virginia, with participants invited from universities, foundations, businesses, and government agencies in the UK and United States. At the end of the conference, the delegates agreed on the need to conduct a joint British-Nigerian-American study of Nigeria's higher education needs.⁶⁸ This new partnership between the British and the United States in African education emerged in the context of the Cold War and decolonization and apparently recognized the need to forge closer relations with Africans in order to prevent them from shifting their allegiance to the communist bloc. At the conference, Pifer spoke on the need to get Nigerians on board, stressing that "we must not try to settle issues which affect the African leaders more vitally than anyone else by discussing them on a purely Anglo-American basis without the participation of the African leaders themselves."⁶⁹ But as of 1958, Nigerians were not involved in the Anglo-American deliberations. One problem was that no one in Nigeria had advocated a national study to reform the higher education system, a fact acknowledged by Cox in his letter to Pifer in July 1958, "at present I cannot clearly see an initiative of this kind coming from the Nigerian Government, or from ourselves unless we have carried the various parties concerned in Nigeria."⁷⁰

Given the heightened wave of Nigerian nationalism in the late 1950s, any proposal coming from non-Nigerians would have been considered suspicious. Pifer and the British were therefore very uncomfortable with the idea of taking the initiative themselves. Undeterred, however, Pifer undertook a trip to Nigeria in November 1958 to sell the idea to the government

officials subtly at the federal and regional levels. His goal was to get Nigerian officials to 'initiate' the study on their own. Before Pifer went to Nigeria, he stopped in London on 20 October 1958 and met with Cox, Thompson, and Sutton at the Colonial Office. At the meeting, the British expressed concern that the head of government of the Eastern Region, Azikiwe, would likely resist the proposed study because he would view it as an attempt to obstruct the implementation of his plans for the University of Nigeria.⁷¹ Aware of what he was up against in Nigeria, Pifer informed the governor-general, Sir James Wilson Robertson, and the deputy governor-general, Sir Ralph Grey, of the purpose of his trip, and requested them to talk informally with key government officials about his impending visit. The idea was to create an atmosphere that would be receptive to Pifer's idea. In turn, top colonial officers in Nigeria approached the federal minister of education, Aja Nwachukwu, with the information that Carnegie might be interested in funding a study of post-secondary education and that Nwachukwu should use Pifer's imminent visit to appeal to him to sponsor the scheme. Nwachukwu agreed. In November 1958, Pifer arrived in Nigeria. In a letter to Stackpole, he noted, "Shortly after I arrived in Lagos, the Federal Minister of Education proposed the survey to me and asked for Carnegie assistance to finance it."⁷² Nwachukwu's readiness to welcome Carnegie as a sponsor of higher education reforms in Nigeria was the consummation of Pifer's long years of sustained effort to involve America in the development of education in British colonies in Africa through the corporation. To Pifer, this was a dream come true.

Pifer's interest in Nigeria's higher education reform was not completely altruistic; it was an opportunity to extend American influence in Africa's most populous nation. While in Nigeria, Pifer presented a lecture at the Philosophical Society of the University College of Ibadan, on 16 November 1958, where he articulated America's goals in what he described as the "sixth period" of the "great American discovery of Africa."⁷³ According to Pifer, American interests in Africa during this period were academic, philanthropic, strategic, and economic. The establishment of formal and informal African studies programs in nine universities and one theological seminary, and the formation of the African Studies Association in 1956, Pifer stressed, indicated growing American attention to Africa.⁷⁴ Pifer noted that Carnegie was primarily in Africa to advance higher education

and research.⁷⁵ Pointing out why Africa was important to the United States, he stressed that “a continent that occupies a fifth of the earth’s surface cannot be without interest to us [America] and of course to the whole Western world.”⁷⁶ In keeping with America’s strategy, particularly in the context of the Cold War, Pifer further noted that “an unfriendly Africa would be a direct threat to our security.”⁷⁷ The United States was mindful of the great natural endowments in Africa and therefore desired “the continent’s minerals and raw materials” and saw no reason “why equitable arrangements cannot be made for us to buy our share of these, and we believe that in so doing we can help Africans develop their resources for their own ends.”⁷⁸ Revealing why he selected Nigeria for the study, Pifer stressed that the country had a great potential as “the twelfth largest independent nation in the world and the third largest in the Commonwealth.”⁷⁹ Pifer spoke the minds of American policy-makers and showed that American involvement was aimed at furthering their own interests while meeting the aspirations of Nigeria. These interests, as I have argued elsewhere, “are not necessarily contradictory. They are, indeed, complementary, for a strong, stable and united Nigeria presented – at least in the mind of Pifer – a future investment opportunity for American businesses.”⁸⁰

To assess how the regions would receive the proposal, Pifer and Nwachukwu toured the three regions in December 1958. The reaction was positive. It was clear from the 1958 tour that the three regions, which had functioned more or less independently since the time of the Macpherson Constitution, were willing to cooperate in educational matters, especially since the educational expansion will help them produce the needed human resources to develop their regions. The enthusiasm expressed by the regions was by no means surprising, because they had made earlier efforts along the lines of expanding educational opportunities and facilities at the primary and secondary school levels. From 1952 when universal free education was introduced in the Western Region to 1959, school facilities expanded to such an extent that primary school enrolment rose from 811,432 in 1955 to 1,080,303 in 1959, while enrolment in secondary grammar schools rose from 10,935 during the same period to 22,374.⁸¹ In the Eastern Region, primary school admission rose from 742,542 during the same period to 1,378,403, and secondary grammar school students rose from 10,584 to 15,789.⁸²

Though the North did not introduce universal free education, primary school enrolment nevertheless increased from 168,521 to 205,912, and secondary grammar school enrolment from 2,671 to 4,683 during the same period.⁸³ Similarly, when the 'national government' under Balewa enacted the Education (Lagos) Act of 1957 for the federal capital, Lagos, primary school students grew from 37,038 to 66,320, and secondary grammar school admission grew from 3,157 to 4,804 during the period between 1957 and 1959.⁸⁴ By 1959, about 2,775,938 students were registered in various primary schools all over the country while 47,650 students were in secondary grammar schools.⁸⁵ According to Fafunwa, "more primary and secondary schools were built and more children enrolled at the two levels between 1951 and 1959 than during the one-hundred years of British rule."⁸⁶

Disappointingly, the existing university turned out an insufficient number of graduates. Data on student registration at UCI reveal that, by 1959, a total number of 939 students studied in UCI: 359 from the Eastern Region; 484 from the Western Region; 74 from the Northern Region; 7 from Lagos; and 17 from Cameroon.⁸⁷ The mass primary and secondary education schemes pursued since 1952, the Nigerianization policy, the critique of UCI's elitism, the initiative of the Eastern Region, and the demands for more universities and more opportunities underscored Nigeria's longing for mass education. This explains, quite explicitly, why Pifer's campaign to review the existing rigid educational system enjoyed wide support among Nigerian leaders. It was apparent in December 1958 that a commission would be set up to revisit the foundations of British higher education policy in Nigeria and articulate ways and means of expanding facilities to achieve mass access. This is because, by that date, the interests of Carnegie, Britain, and Nigeria in higher education reform had coalesced and formed not only the cornerstone of a new era in Anglo-American collaboration in Nigerian higher education expansion but also a prelude to Nigeria's postcolonial commitment to mass university education as well. One major objective that united Carnegie, British, and official Nigerian thinking – though for different reasons – was the achievement of a shift from elite to mass university education. For Carnegie, it was an opportunity to use education as a means to further American involvement in the emerging African nations, though its success depended, in essence, on British endorsement. It was also a way to challenge British influence in Africa by offering Africans an alternative

higher education system based on the American model. In the eyes of the British, the pace of change in the colonies in the late 1950s was uncontrollably fast, and, for that reason, failure to identify with and plan together with these colonies would greatly jeopardize British chances of friendly relations with African countries after these countries had attained their independence. Besides, Britain was concerned that American readiness to assist Azikiwe in his bid to found a university in the east would compromise British influence in Africa's most populous nation. Yet, Britain had no choice but to cooperate since Azikiwe and other pro-American element in Nigeria campaigned for education that was more inclusive and Carnegie was ready to provide funds.

For Nigeria, the proposed study was an unprecedented and a revolutionary opportunity to advance the course of mass university education as a practical and desirable alternative to the elitist system of British higher education. Emergent policy-makers in Nigeria were well informed on the need to satisfy the mounting demand for university opportunities, imbued as they were with the idea of accelerating the training of a skilled labour force for postcolonial economic development and encouraged by the prospects of addressing the regional educational imbalance in order to promote national unity. Therefore, the study – the first inter-regional and international collaboration in Nigeria – became a critical step in the process of integrating Nigeria's pluralistic societies into a united nation. Besides, not only did the proposed study provide a glimpse of how education, politics, and economics intersected, but it also shed light on how massification policies became crucial ingredients in Nigeria's march to nationhood.

The Ashby Commission and the Question of Relevance

Carnegie's major contribution to postcolonial higher education development was its direct involvement in initiating, sponsoring, and shaping the recommendations of the Ashby Commission. Stimulated by the federal and regional governments' mass education programs, Nigeria's primary and secondary school registration soared phenomenally in the 1950s. No similar trend, however, existed at the university level. Although Nigerians yearned for more opportunities for university education, the government

had not assessed the extent of the need. So, when the interest of Nigerian governments in favour of massification coincided with those of the Carnegie Corporation and the British colonial government in 1958, Nigerian federal government officials seized the opportunity to call for the appointment of a commission to assess the higher educational needs of Nigeria. This was what Pifer campaigned for since 1954.

Although it was obvious by December 1958 that a commission would be appointed to re-examine Nigeria's higher education needs, its membership and terms of reference had not yet been figured out. Pifer's early step was to recommend a notable British scholar and admirer of American system, Eric Ashby, to chair the commission because of his prestige in the British higher educational system as well as his familiarity with and admiration of American patterns of education.⁸⁸ Pifer's choice of Ashby was strategic. It aimed at protecting American interest in the final recommendations of the commission as well as guaranteeing that Nigerians would accept the American system of education they hitherto considered as inferior. More importantly, Pifer wished to avoid the possible charge by both the British and Nigerians that the commission was in reality a blatant piece of American interference and a strike against British hegemony in Africa. Thus, Carnegie had to tread carefully and diplomatically. Ashby's leadership, therefore, reassured the British, even though the new 'kids' on the block were, in fact, the Americans.

In his correspondence with V.H.K. Littlewood, the permanent secretary of the federal ministry of education, Pifer conveyed his discussions with British officials in London on the importance of conducting certain professional studies prior to the commission's work. Based on his discussion with Ashby, whom he met in Belfast in December 1958, he suggested that an economist should study the Nigerian economy to determine its capacity to support the expansion of post-secondary education; that an education specialist should organize and supervise the collection of educational statistics; and that an Islamic educator should prepare a paper on Islamic studies in Nigeria and its possible relationship to the development of higher education in the Northern Region.⁸⁹

Nigerians were absent at this stage of the study at which the design of the commission and its membership were discussed. The understanding between Pifer and Lockwood was that either Carnegie or the Inter-University

Council would appoint the commission and have it submit its report before Nigeria's independence (now scheduled for 1 October 1960). However, when Ashby agreed to head the commission, he demonstrated a better understanding of the politics of nationalism by insisting that the Nigerian government should appoint the commission and be intimately involved in the whole process. In addition, he objected to the schedule that required the commission to submit its report before independence, stressing that if the independent Nigerian government were to accept the commission's report, it must reflect the views and initiative of Nigerians. As he cautioned,

Is it not conceivable that the fact that the report was published before independence would give some Nigerian leaders an excuse for disregarding it? In brief, I considered whether the report of this commission wouldn't be better as a first product of an independent Nigeria rather than the last fling of advice to a British colony.⁹⁰

Pifer accepted Ashby's suggestions, and in a letter to Lockwood, Pifer expressed his desire to see that the survey was "fully regarded in Nigeria as a Nigerian affair and if the commission were appointed by Carnegie Corporation or I.U.C., it would tend to be regarded as something imposed from outside."⁹¹

Another area of focus was the nature of the recommendations that the commission would make. The discussion centred on whether the commission's report should link the purposes of higher education directly to economic development by emphasizing training relevant high-level personnel. This developmental dimension echoed the prevailing trend of thought among Western economists who believed that higher education had a critical role to play in socio-economic development of any society.⁹² Carnegie held the notion that education was a tool for modernization, and it hoped that the commission would investigate the interconnection of high-level labour needs, educational development in Nigeria, and economic development. In a memorandum addressed to the deputy governor-general of Nigeria, Sir Ralph Grey, Pifer stressed the economic implications of the commission's tasks and indicated that Carnegie planned to offer assistance to the Nigerian government specifically "to reorganize its

system of higher education in order to make education a direct factor in economic development.”⁹³ Similarly, in a memo to Ashby, Pifer emphasized that since economic development would be of immense importance to Nigerians, the commission should “concentrate on how to develop the personnel for leading positions as a basis for planning of national economic development.”⁹⁴ Sir Christopher Cox, the advisor to the British Ministry of Overseas Development, supported Pifer but stressed that “the commission should deal partly with economic development and partly with solution of [the immediate] manpower problems of Nigeria.”⁹⁵

In promoting national development in postcolonial Nigeria, the training of a high-level workforce was fundamental. Yet Aja Nwachukwu lamented over shortages of “adequate numbers of skilled technicians and of professional workers in all fields,” as the country prepares for independence.⁹⁶ Mindful of the human resource shortages in Nigeria, and motivated by the support for change, the federal and regional governments moved speedily to propose the immediate appointment of the commission to study the higher education needs of Nigeria. Consequently, in March 1959, the governor-general of Nigeria, James Robertson, sent a dispatch to the secretary of state for the colonies, Lennox Boyd, to inform the Colonial Office that the Nigerian governments welcomed the idea of a commission to study post-secondary education. The dispatch further stated that the education minister had also accepted the recommendation of the colonial advisor on education, Cox, that Eric Ashby should head the commission.⁹⁷ Acknowledging the importance of the proposed commission, Robertson declared that

the number of educated young Nigerians produced from these sources is significant, but they are in no way adequate to the needs of the country. It is the view of the government that there must over the coming years be a considerable expansion of facilities for higher education in Nigeria. That the need exists and that it is urgent is not doubted; but its extent has not yet been studied and no programme has been drawn up for meeting it.⁹⁸

The education minister in concurrence of the government of the regions announced the appointment of the Commission on Post-Secondary and

Higher Education on 27 April 1959. The terms of reference of the commission, usually referred to as the Ashby Commission, were principally “[t]o conduct an investigation into Nigeria’s needs in the field of post-secondary and higher education over the next twenty years, and in the light of the Commission’s findings to make recommendations as to how these needs can be met.”⁹⁹ The members of the commission consisted of three Nigerians (one from each region), three Americans, and three Britons.¹⁰⁰ The commission, as Pifer had suggested, invited five experts to prepare papers on certain aspects of the commission’s work.¹⁰¹ Although the commission was a joint Nigerian, U.S., and UK operation, Carnegie funded it.

The inaugural meeting of the commission was held on 4 May 1959 in Lagos.¹⁰² This was the beginning of an extensive study, involving meetings and regional field trips. The Ashby Commission was a milestone in the history of education in Nigeria. For the first time, Nigeria, the UK, and the United States came together to re-examine the principles that guided British higher education policies in Nigeria with a view to adjusting them to serve the current and future needs of a country advancing towards independence. As J.F. Ade Ajayi and others have noted, international involvement “interacted with the politics of independence to usher in a new age of higher education in Nigeria.”¹⁰³ Besides this, it was the first time that the Northern, Western, and Eastern Regions had consented to a collective project in educational matters. Earlier, they had independently pursued their education policies without accepting federal coordination.

Should the anticipated recommendations emphasize courses in applied sciences in order to achieve economic development, or should they call for an expansion of access to university education with emphasis on the liberal arts? This question dominated discussions until September 1960 when the commission submitted its report. Lockwood, a British member of the Ashby Commission, hoped that “whatever the final recommendation, Nigerian universities should not continue to follow the pattern of the University of London.”¹⁰⁴ He noted that such changes did not mean a departure from “what we regard as reasonable demands upon students,” and he recommended that Nigeria should incorporate the Scottish model because “if it had the benefit of considerable infiltration of American-type courses it would probably be especially beneficial for meeting some of the special needs of Nigeria.”¹⁰⁵ An American member of the commission,

Francis Kepple, dean of Harvard's Graduate School of Education, insisted that Nigeria should modify the tradition embodied in the Asquith report by "making opportunities for higher education more widely available, and by changing its content so as to approximate the pattern of American land-grant colleges."¹⁰⁶ This thinking implied that the recommendation of the commission on university reform would emphasize courses in the vocational and applied sciences that were vital to Nigeria's economic development as opposed to the existing emphasis on liberal education.

On the other hand, a British member of the commission, G.E. Watts, an educationist, argued that recommending only the training of a technical labour force for purposes of economic development would be a futile exercise as it was unlikely in the "foreseeable future that a considerable number of Nigerians would be attracted to it."¹⁰⁷ However, he urged the commission to stress that an adequate supply of applied scientists, engineers, technologists, technicians, and artisans was indispensable for economic development. The main issue, according to Watts, was to find "some blend of the British and American system which might be acceptable and effective in Nigeria."¹⁰⁸ Eric Ashby, in retrospect, believed that the best way to achieve Watts's goal was "not to go slow on education but to ruthlessly ensure that education is relevant, even if it means a radical departure from the forms and patterns associated with education in modern industrial societies."¹⁰⁹ He affirmed that

The recommendations ... had on the one hand to be sufficiently deeply rooted in the existing pattern of Nigerian education to be acceptable and practicable ... on the other hand the recommendations had to promote adaptation, to stimulate innovation and prevent Nigerian higher education from congealing into a neo-British mould.¹¹⁰

Although there was a consensus among members of the commission and Nigerians on the expansion of educational facilities, some members of the commission and faculty of UCI opposed the idea of closely associating higher education with economic development through an emphasis on the sciences. Kenneth Dike, the principal of UCI and a member of the Ashby Commission, argued that the proposed curriculum reform in favour

of science courses should not affect established institutions like UCI. He further stressed that “progress in science, medicine, and technology should tend to follow rather than precede education.”¹¹¹ He therefore urged the commission to allow UCI to continue with “the higher education of the elite,” who would be leaders of thought.¹¹² Likewise, John Fergusson, the head of classical education at UCI, maintained that Nigerian university education should be limited to the act of nurturing and producing the “men and women with standards of public service and capacity for leadership which self-rule requires.”¹¹³ Onabamiro, a member of the commission, believed that the unwarranted prominence given to science and technology would endanger education standards, suggesting that the “special relations existing between UCI and universities abroad – preferably the UK – should be maintained.”¹¹⁴

In addition, some members of UCI’s senate expressed considerable fear that the proposed curriculum changes would interfere with the high standards of the college and could counteract the influence of the college on the future pattern of higher education in Nigeria.¹¹⁵ Even the Joint Consultative Committee on Education (JCC), the most influential body in the formulation of policy in the 1960s, opposed any adjustment in the existing pattern, objectives, or curriculum, basing its objections on the need to preserve academic standards.¹¹⁶ Undeniably, the strong opposition to curriculum changes from the academic community, who constituted a small percentage of the Nigerian population, highlighted the pervasive influence of the elitist British tradition; many scholars who had studied under the British system selfishly defended liberal education even when an emphasis on applied courses was vital to economic development. As Sime rightly noted, “The upholders of traditional education in the humanities often hold views biased by their own success, a success which was achieved in the absence of any real competition from other disciplines.”¹¹⁷

Whether there was to be an emphasis on applied science courses or on liberal arts courses, the three regions were eager to pursue the expansion of university facilities and the opportunities to train personnel who would fill senior positions in the civil service. They were less concerned with whether or not at the national level the federal government emphasized science and technology courses in the university education curriculum. Alhaji Isa Kaita, the regional minister of education in the Northern

Region, expressed his government's overriding concern to see the creation of a university in Zaria to help produce the skilled labour the region desperately needed.¹¹⁸ Political leaders in the Western Region wanted an end to limited opportunities at UCI, which was why the region had advanced a plan to found its own university.¹¹⁹ In the Eastern Region, Jerome Udoji, the secretary to the premier, indicated that the educational concern of his government was to enable the regional government to meet their administrative needs by producing local candidates for employment in various branches of the public service.¹²⁰

The regions' overriding need for an educated labour force showed that UCI did not train enough Nigerian personnel for public service. Nigerian nationalists and government officials had since 1948 bemoaned the inadequate opportunities and facilities to ensure mass access to university education in spite of the high demand. Mass education experiments in the 1950s produced potential candidates for higher education and whetted appetites for more education. Sir Ronald Gould, a British schoolteacher and trade unionist who conducted a three-week tour of Nigeria in 1960, observed that "the demand for education ... at all levels seems to be insatiable.... Everybody sees its desirability and even its necessity."¹²¹ However, since opportunities for access to education were limited, many Nigerians who had the means continued to travel overseas for higher studies. By August 1960, there were at least 47,500 overseas students in Britain. Out of the 8,500 students from West Africa studying overseas, Nigeria topped the list with 6,000 students.¹²²

The lack of adequate opportunities for Nigerians who desired university training was a common criticism of the British higher education system, and the call for massification of university education in place of elitist education dominated newspapers throughout the 1960s. American educational policy, based on the maximum development of every individual to the limit of his capacity, reverberated in the discussions and constituted a crucial reference point in the public quest for unlimited access to university education.¹²³ Notably, Olalekan Are, a former UCI student, specifically dismissed UCI as "a waste of taxpayers' money." He reminded the government of the belief in the United States that every qualified candidate was capable of learning. According to him, what UCI needed was the U.S. land grant college policy, which held: "admit and give education to all qualified

candidates. Never refuse any qualified student.”¹²⁴ He further argued that if this policy were implemented, UCI would handle 10,000 students, as opposed to less than a thousand. He made the following recommendations:

The UCI entrance examination should be open to all persons irrespective of their grades in the West African School Certificate. Students should be paired up in every room and off-campus students should be encouraged as from 1960–61 session. The idea of all students being in residence must be forgotten in the interest of the nations’ needs and progress. The building of more staff quarters should be discouraged so as to have enough room for future college expansion.... Money should be made available to students who cannot afford the college fees.¹²⁵

Are’s suggestions highlighted the factors that had limited access to university education for many Nigerians. These factors, as Dr. S.D. Onabamiro stated, were absent from the American system because American higher education broadly reflects “the fundamental democratic principles governing the structure of its society, and are a sharp reaction to the traditional European conception of university which used to be an exclusive preserve of the aristocracy, the upper classes, the rich and the privileged.”¹²⁶ Instead of shutting out capable prospective students, according to Onabamiro, the general principle governing admission into American higher education “prefers to err on the side of taking in people who may not be able to go through the courses.”¹²⁷ In their letters to the editor of the *Daily Times*, Orotayo Kitchie and J.A.O. Odupitan supported the call for expansion. Kitchie strongly appealed to the government to respond to the universal yearning for education by eligible candidates and to abandon the policy of education for the few.¹²⁸ As Odupitan stated, the government “must make haste to expand the existing scheme to suit our outlook; abandon forthwith the bogus idea of education for the very few who could afford it; [and encourage] more afternoon and evening classes.... Call it cheap education or whatever you like, but we are sure to have education at its best for the masses.”¹²⁹

Public sentiment in favour of educational expansion was rife as Nigeria even approached independence. They highlighted the growing

belief that Nigeria's modernization and nation-building would be possible only through mass access to university education. Members of the Ashby Commission, who travelled to all the regions, were attentive to public opinion on education and, as shown in chapter 3, they echoed it in their report submitted to the federal government in September 1960. The implementation of the report produced by the commission marked a turning point in Nigeria's higher education, economic development, and nation-building. As the Prime Minister, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa noted, the report was "simply most important piece of business facing Nigeria" stressing that "the country's very future depends on it."¹³⁰