



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

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The Ashby Commission, Regionalism, and University Education in the 1960s

Our program for higher education should include a chance for the man who was not chosen in the early days of small numbers.

– FRANCIS KEPPEL, 1959

Introduction

The 1960s was a period of optimism in Africa. This was not surprising; most African countries had successfully fought to end colonial rule. To postcolonial African people, education, as shown in *Education and Nation Building in Africa*, held “the key that will open the door to a better life and the higher living standards they were promised as the reward of the struggle for nation liberation.”¹ Rising expectation naturally weighed heavily on the shoulders of Africa’s new leadership. Educational expansion, as a passport to future socio-economic development and nation-building, was the premise that shaped and directed the socio-economic policies of these leaders. Access to education in colonial Nigeria was highly limited, and although policy-makers in Africa recognized that educational expansion would be expensive, they believed it was a rewarding investment.

Julius Nyerere, the president of Tanzania, envisioned that universities must “join with the people of East Africa in the struggle to build a nation worthy of the opportunity we have won.”² Félix Houphouët-Boigny,

the president of Côte d'Ivoire, wished to engage universities in realizing the expectations of modern economy. As he rightly stated, the "problems of political, economic, and cultural development of our societies, and rising of the standard of living constitute immediate objectives ... require us to enlist the help of all the institutions of our states."³ In his address at the inauguration of Haile Selassie 1 University in 1961, Emperor Haile Selassie, the president of Ethiopia stressed that "universities today stand as the most promising hope for constructive solutions to the problems that beset the modern world ... and the money spent in coordinating, strengthening, and expanding higher education in Ethiopia is well invested."⁴ The period following political independence in most developing countries, especially those in Africa, was characterized by rapid expansion of access to education at all levels. In *Education and Social Transition in the Third World*, Carnoy and Samoff noted that

the leadership in these societies does not just mouth rhetoric about changing and developing education. They expand it more rapidly and reach out to more people of all ages than in any previous efforts in history. They mobilize entire populations to achieve universal literacy over a short period and invent new ways to expand and deliver all levels of schooling to their citizenry.⁵

Nigeria gained independence from Britain in 1960, and Nigerian leaders shared the prevailing conviction in Africa that investment in university would help modernize their country. In an inaugural address delivered on his installation as the first chancellor of UCI, the prime minister, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, declared that in this age of rapid technological development in the Western world, "the key to a nation's economic well-being is likely to be the amount of effort that is put into scientific research and education."⁶ Earlier in 1959, the Ashby Commission was set up to help chart the course for the country's educational expansion. Based on its prediction of Nigeria in 1980 as a nation "taking its place in a technological civilization, with its own airways, its organs of mass-communication, its research institutes," the commission submitted bold proposals of educational expansion to the Balewa administration in September 1960, fittingly

titled *Investment in Education: The Report of the Commission on Post-School Certificate and Higher Education*.⁷

The proposals addressed six interconnected issues, revolving around the necessity of expanding educational facilities and opportunities in order to advance both economic development and national integration; to commit available financial resources as well as secure international assistance to meet that objective; and finally, to create institutions to implement, evaluate, and monitor performance. Here, education, national needs, and external forces intersected, shedding light on how education policies shaped modern Nigeria during the period of first attempt at mass university education (1960–70). Although the goal of using mass university education to meet the country's needs for economic development and nation-building was not met during the 1960s due to regional rivalries, flawed admission, and science policies, as well as the Nigerian civil war (1967–70), the modest progress made during this period laid the foundation to future ambitious attempts at educational expansion.

Ashby recommendations guided the government in departing from the British system and employing educational expansion to serve Nigeria's needs. The commission's bold approach to educational planning differed significantly from the cautious and modest approach that had characterized colonial educational planning. Britain's policy on education, which offered £50 million to the colonies under the Colonial Development and Welfare Act of 1940, provided for controlled educational expansion within 'financial limits.' In contrast, Ashby suggested that financial limits should not hinder expansion. For the commission, education was an investment for which financing must be sought from Nigerian as well as external sources. It was no longer, as the commission insisted, a matter of budgeting according to what the country could afford but a matter of budgeting according to its future needs.⁸

Blueprint for Change

Unlike previous colonial educational reports and policies, the Ashby report acknowledged the link between investment in education and economic development, declaring that the training of a labour force in the universities,

especially in the sciences, was a vital component of economic development. As the report noted, “of all Nigeria’s resources her young people are the most valuable; expenditure upon their education should be a first charge upon the nation’s finances.”⁹ Accordingly, it recommended that the minimum need over the next ten years was 80,000 people with higher education, 30,000 of whom would be in senior positions, “managerial, professional and administration.”¹⁰ To attain the target, the report recommended “an annual flow of at least 2,000 graduates from universities” in place of the present flow of “300 from Ibadan and perhaps 600 from overseas.”¹¹ This projection was based on the submission of F.H. Harbison, an economist and human capital theorists who conducted a special study of Nigeria’s labour needs at the post-secondary level. In Harbison’s report, published in full as chapter 1 of the Ashby’s report, he stressed that the training of human resources was indispensable for Nigeria’s economic development and was a matter of urgency. Harbison argued that

Of all the resources required for economic development, high-level manpower requires the longest ‘lead-time’ for creation. Modern dams, power stations, textile factories, or steel mills could be constructed within a few years. But it takes between 10 and 15 years to develop the managers, the administrators, and the engineers to operate them. Schools and college buildings can be erected in a matter of months; but it requires decades to develop high-level teachers and professors.¹²

Second, to meet the commission’s estimate of the required workforce, it was necessary to build more facilities to absorb demand. Thus, the report proposed three additional universities, to be located in Lagos and the Eastern and Northern regions. The one in Lagos would operate day and evening courses leading to degrees in commerce, business administration, economics, and social science, including courses at the graduate level in higher management studies.¹³ In the east, the University of Nigeria at Nsukka would be integrated with the Enugu branch of the Nigerian College of Arts, Science and Technology, while the buildings of the Nigerian College of Arts, Science and Technology in Zaria would become the nucleus for the northern university. The huge land mass and population of Nigeria

were major factors in the spread of universities to all regions. As the report noted, “the distances in Nigeria, the variety of people which comprise her population ... all point to the need for at least one university in each Region.”¹⁴

With UCI located in the West, all the regions would have a university but regional politics propelled politicians in the West to seek the creation of another university they would control since the federal government controlled UCI. The report, however, rejected the idea of another university in the Western Region but anticipated a time when there would be “a need for more than one university in each region.”¹⁵ As the commission revised its recommendations for submission, the education minister in the Western Region informed the commission that the region had decided to establish a university with regional funds.¹⁶ Nevertheless, the commission insisted in its recommendation that the federal government should not extend financial assistance to more than one university in each region.¹⁷ In support of his region, S.O. Onabamiro, who represented the Western Region in the commission, disagreed with the majority report and issued a minority report where he proposed the establishment of two universities in all the regions, which would bring the number of universities to seven.¹⁸

To ensure a steady supply of candidates for university education, the commission’s report stressed the need to maintain a healthy educational pyramid with the primary school at the base, followed by secondary schools, and with post-secondary schools at the apex. The report observed that, while the pyramid in the South (East and West) was broad at the primary and secondary levels, it constricted far too sharply at the university level. In the North, the pyramid was slim at all levels. The report strongly urged that a proper balance of primary, secondary, and post-secondary education should guide subsequent educational programs.¹⁹ It suggested the creation of 600 more secondary schools, an enlargement of existing secondary schools to facilitate a massive intake, and an increase in secondary school admission from 12,000 per annum since 1958 to more than 30,000 in 1970.²⁰

Furthermore, the report suggested an increase of sixth forms to expand the number of university aspirants. The British introduced the sixth form in 1956 as a two- to three-year intermediary period of study between secondary school and university, leading to the Higher School Certificate

(HSC) or General Certificate “A” Level. It was a requirement for direct entry into UCI. Few secondary schools had the facilities and personnel for sixth form education. Besides, it was easier to gain admission to the university with ‘O’ Levels than with ‘A’ Levels. The commission recognized this problem by recommending an increase in the number of sixth forms from 22 to 110 to provide a sufficient stream of potential university students. It noted that 29,000 children would complete secondary school certificates; about 21,000 of them should seek employment, and about 8,000 should go for further training.²¹

Third, to enhance access to universities, the report emphasized the overriding need for greater flexibility and diversity in university education to accommodate the diverse interests of potential candidates. It suggested greater diversification of the university curriculum to include courses often neglected in UCI such as African studies, commerce and business administration, teaching, engineering, medicine and veterinary science, agriculture, law, and extension services. The report acknowledged that the British system of university education as obtainable suited the British because in Britain there were many alternative routes to professional training, “and the prestige of these alternative routes is such that thousands of young people prefer to take them rather than go to the university.”²² That system, however, did not suit Nigeria. According to the report,

In a country where these alternative routes are missing or carry less prestige, the British university system is too inflexible and too academic to meet national needs. We think it is unlikely that in Nigeria these alternative routes will, in the foreseeable future, acquire the prestige which universities already have. Accordingly, a much greater diversity of demand is likely to be made on Nigerian universities than on their British counterparts.²³

The report revealed its admiration for the American system of higher education when it identified the American land-grant universities as models for the diversification of university studies in Nigeria. According to the report, “the land-grant universities of the United States have had to fulfill functions similar to those which Nigerian universities are now called upon

to fulfill, and the best of them have done so without in any way surrendering their integrity.”²⁴ Although the report did not impose either the American or the British system of education on Nigeria, it argued that “neither kind of university should be exported unchanged to Nigeria; but both kinds have something to teach this country, and the lessons to be learnt from America include diversity and flexibility.”²⁵

To promote mass access to university education, the Ashby Commission recognized the importance of scholarship awards. In the past, lack of funds had prevented many bright students from accepting places offered them by UCI. According to Kenneth Dike, the principal of the college, the university asked more than 101 students who had failed to pay their fees to withdraw at the end of the 1959/60 session.²⁶ The Ashby Commission thus recommended “that grants should be made from regional or federal funds to all students who are accepted for admission to Nigerian universities and who are not able to pay for their university education themselves.”²⁷

Fourth, the commission was sensitive to the role of educational opportunities and facilities in promoting national cohesion. When Nigeria attained independence in 1960, the question of unity and balanced educational development for the equitable training of personnel, earlier subordinated to academic standards during the colonial period, assumed great importance. The commission envisaged that federal appointments would continue to generate controversy because the North was disadvantaged in terms of available high-level personnel as compared with other regions. The North did not stand a chance if strict academic merit determined appointments at the federal and regional levels of government. Therefore, the recommendation to establish a university in the North served to provide more opportunities for northerners to catch up with the South. Acknowledging the existence of strong regional loyalties as well as inter-regional rivalry, the commission warned: “It would be a disaster if each university were to serve only its own region.”²⁸ The report called for a uniform admission policy for all the universities, based on merit without discriminating against any region or ethnic group, but cautioned that

the borders between Regions must never become barriers to the migration of brains. Nigeria’s intellectual life, and her economy, will suffer unless there is free migration of both staff and

students from one Region to another. We know that we are echoing the convictions of Nigerian leaders when we say that one of the purposes of education in this country is to promote cohesion between her Regions. Universities should be a powerful instrument for this purpose: it is their duty to respond.²⁹

Fifth, since the funds required for university expansion were enormous, the commission suggested that, for the country to meet the ambitious targets contained in the report, Nigerians must be prepared to accord education first priority; to make sacrifices for it as well as to seek external assistance. The report noted that the proposal was a “stupendous undertaking” and therefore “Nigerian people will have to forgo other things they want so that every available penny is invested in education. Even this will not be enough. Countries outside Nigeria will have to be enlisted to help with men and money. Nigerian education must for a time become an international enterprise.”³⁰

Sixth, the commission recommended the establishment of two inter-regional institutions to ensure the successful implementation of government policies. The first was the National Universities Commission, whose function was to secure and distribute funds to universities, co-ordinate the activities of the universities, and provide cohesion for the whole system of higher education in the country. The second was the Inter-Regional Manpower Board, which was charged with the duty to continuously review the labour needs of the country and to formulate programs for effective staff development. Since the 1960 Constitution granted autonomy to the regions, these bodies were designed to co-ordinate the activities of all the universities to ensure uniform development.

The Ashby Commission’s proposal was based on the need to invest in mass education for economic development and nation-building. As the report noted, “it would be a grave disservice to Nigeria to make modest, cautious proposals, likely to fall within her budget, for such proposals would be totally inadequate to maintain even the present rate of economic growth.”³¹ By broadening its terms of reference to include the need for primary, secondary, technical, and teacher education, the commission recognized the pyramidal structure of education, with all levels of the pyramid being connected. Its vision for education ultimately became a

blueprint for educational development in Nigeria. Throughout the 1960s, government was mindful of the commission's proposals as they aimed to reshape the direction of societal change; to correct the educational imbalances between the North and the South; to diversify the university education system; and to expand, improve, and democratize university facilities and opportunities. By attempting to reconfigure and reconceptualize the inherited system of higher education to serve Nigeria's postcolonial needs for a high-level labour force, economic and technological development, and national integration, the Ashby report presented a strategy for Nigeria's circumstances in the 1960s and beyond.

While the federal government considered the ramifications of the Ashby report submitted to it in September 1960, the Eastern Region went ahead to open the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN) on 7 October 1960. The university started with the faculty of arts, but enrolment surged when broad and wide-ranging courses in the faculties of agriculture, applied sciences, and vocational studies were offered.³² Dr. George Johnson, the first acting principal of the university, noted that the purpose of curriculum diversity was to “develop professional and practical curricula which produce citizens who are broadly educated and at the same time equipped with specialized knowledge which will enable them engage in productive work in a rapidly changing society.”³³

Since the Eastern Region founded UNN by taking advantage of the provision of 1954 as well as the independence constitution (which placed higher education on the Concurrent Legislative List), the Western Region pressed ahead with its plan to establish a regional university. As far back as 1958, the Action Group had been quite critical of the elitist character of UCI, and the regional government wanted an institution that would symbolize its idea of a university.³⁴ However, Ashby's report did not recommend the establishment of a university in the region because UCI, though a federal university, was located in the west and was expected to meet the higher education needs of the entire region. Given the fact that the region had made plans since 1958 to establish a university in the area and the minority report authored by Onabamiro favoured more than one university in each region, the region forged ahead with the idea of a regional university despite the majority report, citing regional interests as a motivating factor.

Although UCI was located in the Western Region, government officials in the region argued that the institution catered to broad national interests. They therefore sought to establish another university in the region that would serve only regional interests. The idea of a regional university was, perhaps, an attempt to afford the region full control of one university, a privilege that they anticipated the other regions would soon enjoy. Thus, in 1960, the government of the Western Region set up a university planning committee and later appointed a team that studied the systems of higher education in the United States, Mexico, Brazil, and Israel. Since the constitution permitted regional ownership of institutions of higher education on their own financial responsibility, the federal government did not stop the region from pursuing its plan. Subsequently, the region passed legislation authorizing the setting up of the University of Ife.

The ethnic/regional rivalries that had been a common feature of Nigeria's political life since the British created the three regional governments in 1939 manifested in the Western Region's quest to own a university. In the white paper released in 1960, the government accused the Ashby commission of neglecting it in its recommendations for new universities in Nigeria. It noted that while the commission recommended the establishment of universities other regions, it failed to do the same for the Western Region. The sentiments expressed in the white paper clearly revealed the intense mutual suspicion and ethnic rivalry that characterized inter-regional relations in Nigeria, especially when it presented the likely implications of not owning a university. According to the paper, the Eastern Region would own

its own Regional University, as well as continue to enjoy its quota of admissions into the University College, Ibadan. The Northern Region might also have a new University College in Kano, the Ahmadu Bello College, as well as continue to enjoy its own quota of admissions into the University College, Ibadan, with the consolation, of course, that students from this Region might also be admitted into the Federal University Institutions in other parts of the Country.³⁵

The allusion to a quota system (an affirmative action policy) of admission, supposedly applied to UCI as part of the justification for establishing a regional university in the Western Region, was both erroneous and propagandistic. The institution, in fact, did not have a quota policy for the regions following the 1952 report of the Inter-University Council. Indeed, the driving force behind the Western Region's plan to establish a university was to prevent other regions from surpassing it in training workforce. Protecting the interests of the region in the context of regional competition was a fundamental driving force, and it was evident in the white paper's concluding remarks:

The Government has seriously considered the present position and the new situation that might arise, and regards it as its duty to take the proper measure to safeguard the interest of the people of Western Nigeria in the provision of facilities for higher education. It is in order to meet the challenge of the situation that the Government has decided to build a new university.³⁶

Implementing Ashby's Report

The federal government accepted the recommendations of the Ashby Commission in 1960 "in principle as a sound analysis of the present position, and [declared] that their recommendation, with some amendments, should constitute the basis for the development of post-School Certificate and Higher Education in Nigeria for the next ten years."³⁷ In announcing this conclusion, the federal government proclaimed its determination to pursue an energetic policy of higher educational development and the promotion of nation-building and the economic development of the nation. As the government declared, "Nigeria must aim to make and sustain an educational effort more than three times as great as is already being made now."³⁸ To achieve this, it proclaimed its readiness "to play its full part in the implementation of these proposals [hoping that] ... Regional Governments will be willing to shoulder their share of the financial burden of implementing the proposals."³⁹

Where the federal government found the commission's recommendations to be somewhat conservative, it favoured a more radical approach. For instance, it extended the proposals by recommending a target enrolment of 10,000 students as against the 7,500 suggested by the Ashby Commission.⁴⁰ In addition, it stated government readiness to raise the number of sixth form streams to 350 in order to increase the number of students preparing for the Higher School Certificate (HSC) or the General Certificate of Education ('A' Level) to over 10,000.⁴¹ The paper also accepted the Western Region's plans to establish a university.

The endorsement of the Ashby report was a turning point in the development of higher education in Nigeria; it formed the basis for the launching of the First National Development Plan (First NDP) for the period between 1962 and 1968. Education planning, for the first time in the country's history, was made to constitute a strategic part of national development planning. Prior to this plan, there was no comprehensive development plan. The colonial development plan was limited to the development of the agricultural sector only in terms of promoting some cash crops and the building of transport and communication systems; it neglected industrial, human resource development and nation-building. The overall national educational goal, as articulated in the First NDP, was the "democratization of education at all levels, and for all Nigerians, irrespective of their geographical location, religious persuasion, and age."⁴² The plan further declared that Nigeria's "virile population has scarcely yet been developed to a degree sufficient to alleviate the poverty of the bulk of the people."⁴³ For the period of the First NDP, the government earmarked a total expenditure of £45 to £65 million for the implementation of the federal and regional governments' programs in the education sector. This amount, which represented about 60 per cent of the total expenditure for the First NDP, was enormous. However, the federal government was hoping to attract external funds to support this ambitious plan.⁴⁴

To finance its expensive educational goals – and in fulfillment of the Ashby Commission's suggestion – the federal government sought external financial support. External donors committed an estimated amount of £10 million for university education in Nigeria from 1960 to 1964 in the form of foundation grants for research, endowment, and buildings. For instance, USAID provided over £1 million to UNN, the initial principal and first

two vice-chancellors (G.M. Johnson 1960–64, and Glen Taggart 1964–66), and thirty professors and teachers biennially, with equipment and technical assistance especially in the central administration and agriculture. Furthermore, the Rockefeller Foundation supported agricultural and medical research and staff development at Ibadan; the Nuffield Foundation supported research facilities; the Carnegie Corporation supported education projects and institutes of education in the universities that emerged in 1960s; and the Netherlands government allocated grants to develop the faculty of engineering at UNN. UNESCO provided general assistance at Lagos, especially in the school of business administration, in collaboration with USAID; and the West German government awarded scholarships to students at various universities.⁴⁵ This external generosity demonstrated the commitment of Western countries to consolidate their hold on Nigeria in its fight against communism.

To ensure the realization of Nigeria's needs for a trained labour force, and acting on the recommendation of the Ashby Commission, the federal government composed the National Manpower Board (NMB) and the National Universities Commission (NUC) in 1962. It appointed Dr. T.M. Yesufu, a senior labour officer in the Federal Ministry of Labour, as the secretary of the NMB. The board's responsibility was to "determine periodically the nation's man-power needs in all occupations, and formulate programmes for effective man-power development throughout the federation through university expansion, scholarships, and fellowships."⁴⁶ Ideally, the recommendations of the NMB would have shaped the development plan, but the federal government launched the First NDP before forming the NMB. The shortage of high-level personnel was a central causative factor. In his speech at the first meeting of the NMB on 4 December 1962, the minister of economic development noted that "it has taken so long to constitute the Board because of a number of difficulties, one of which emphasizes the importance of your work: namely, that qualified persons were not easily available for appointment to the specialist post in the manpower Secretariat."⁴⁷ During the third meeting of the board, the minister reiterated the problem when he stated that "there are critical shortages in capital formation and high-level manpower. The two are intricately intertwined: capital is needed for manpower development but capital will be wasted if there is no adequate manpower to make optimum use of it."⁴⁸

In line with the Ashby report, the federal government also set up the NUC under Okoi Arikpo as the executive secretary and charged it with the duty, among others, “to inquire into and advise the government on financial needs both recurrent and capital of university education in Nigeria.” It was also required “to consult with the universities and other relevant bodies to plan the balanced and coordinated development of the universities in order to ensure that they are fully adequate to meet the national needs.” The commission was to “receive annually a block grant from the federal government and allocate it to universities with such conditions as the commission may think advisable.”⁴⁹ The federal government’s prioritization of higher education in the First NDP and the emergence of both the NMB and NUC testified to the importance it attached to the expansion of university education in Nigeria. As Bello Salim aptly observed, the implementation of the Ashby report “started Nigeria’s march towards general access to university education.”⁵⁰

Furthermore, in keeping with the commission’s suggestions, the government of the North under the leadership of its first premier, Ahmadu Bello, invited a delegation from the Inter-University Council for Higher Education Overseas in April 1961 to seek their advice on the proposed university for the region. The delegation observed that besides providing the much-needed labour force, establishing a university in the North would stimulate all forms of education in the region, and it stressed the need for extra-mural studies to guarantee a supply of university candidates.⁵¹ Following the advice of the delegation, the House of Assembly passed the law that established the Provisional Council for the proposed university in November 1961, and in June 1962 it established Ahmadu Bello University (ABU), located in Zaria. The North funded ABU, although the federal government gave the university the old site of the Nigerian College of Arts, Science, and Technology in Zaria, which was valued at £2.6 million. Formal lectures began on 4 October 1962 with 400 students spread through the faculties of Arts and Education, Pure Science, Social Science, Technology, and Agriculture and Forestry.

Acting also on the recommendations of the Ashby Commission, the federal government sought help from the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in planning the University of Lagos. The UNESCO advisory committee for the

establishment of the University of Lagos, appointed in June 1961, submitted its report in September of the same year. The report favoured opening the university with faculties of medicine, law, and commerce as well as faculties of arts, science, education, and engineering, and the Institute of African Studies. It also recommended the development of evening classes in all faculties, especially those of law and commerce.⁵² In April 1962, the federal parliament passed a law establishing the University of Lagos (UNILAG), and, on 22 October 1962, the university opened with a student population of 100.⁵³ Since it was a federal university, the federal government provided 100 per cent funding for UNILAG. Similarly, on 24 October 1962, the University of Ife, Ile-Ife, established by the Western Region, opened with 244 students. The region wholly funded Ife, although the federal government gave the university the site of the old Nigerian College of Arts, Science, and Technology, valued at £1.5 million. The students were admitted into five faculties: agriculture, arts, economics and social science, law, and science, including pharmacy. Later courses in medical sciences, education, and agricultural engineering were added to the curriculum.⁵⁴

By 1962, two years after independence, five universities had emerged in Nigeria, including UCI, which in 1962 severed its relationship with the University of London to become an autonomous degree-awarding institution called University of Ibadan (UI). The three regions owned and financed their respective universities at Nsukka, Ife, and Zaria, while the federal government owned and financed the universities in Lagos and Ibadan. During the 1961/62 session, there were 3,235 students were in all Nigerian universities, the highest enrolment in sub-Saharan Africa.⁵⁵ The determining factors for the establishment of regional universities were political and regional interests. The regions determined what kind of universities they wanted and where they were located. While the federal government yielded to the ambitions of the regions, it was equally acting in accordance with the conviction that education would open the road to social and economic development as well as respect for the regions whose power the constitution recognized.

With the increase in the number of universities, it became necessary to set up a forum for the vice-chancellors of these institutions to come together and discuss issues of common concern. That forum, called the

Committee of Vice-Chancellors (CVC), was founded in 1962 on the initiation of K.O. Dike. Fashioned after the Committee of Vice-Chancellors of the United Kingdom, which was a powerful non-statutory body, the CVC, as defined by Dr. Jubril Aminu, was “an informal, non-statutory body set up by the Universities to advise themselves on matters of mutual interest.”⁵⁶ The forum brought vice-chancellors together in a loose, non-statutory organization with moral power based on the consensus of the members in order to make decisions for the smooth and uniform development of universities. However, its decisions were advisory; the federal and regional governments were not bound by them because there was no force of law to back them. Nevertheless, the CVC became a formidable force in shaping and influencing government policies on university education throughout the rest of the twentieth century, notably in the 1970s – as shown in chapter 4.

Like the CVC, the NUC had no statutory power. It was an administrative unit in the Cabinet Office and thus functioned in an advisory capacity and lacked power to enforce its decisions, especially as the regional governments jealously guarded their autonomy over their universities. This rendered the NUC ineffective in fulfilling the aims and objectives the government envisaged. In carrying out its duties, however, the NUC visited all universities between October 1962 and May 1963.⁵⁷ At each university, the commission had discussions with members of the governing councils, the senates, the deans of faculties, the non-professional academic staff, the administration, the non-academic staff, and the students. The commission submitted its report in 1963 to the federal government. The report addressed university funding and enrolment issues. First, it proposed that the federal government should be responsible for 50 per cent of the total recurrent and capital expenditure of the three regional universities at Nsukka, Ife, and Zaria, while federal universities in Lagos and Ibadan should continue to receive 100 per cent subsidies.

Second, based on the projection of student numbers submitted by various universities, the commission projected an enrolment of 10,000 full-time students by 1967–68, spread according to the following order of disciplines: agriculture, forestry, and fisheries, 1,250 students; pure science, 2,830; veterinary science, 300; medicine, 1,000; engineering, 2,000; arts, 1,420; and others (business, social studies, and management), 1,000.⁵⁸ The

suggestion for higher intake in science courses represented the view of the Ashby Commission as well as the need for the universities to respond to government desire for rapid economic development. The NUC report noted that since the sixth form facilities did not adequately train potential university candidates, it was necessary to offer preliminary courses in Nigerian universities, especially for science courses, to provide opportunities for all Nigerians. At the same time, it stressed that the government should continue to expand the sixth form facilities in Lagos and the regions.⁵⁹

Furthermore, the commission acknowledged the increasing demand for university education among Nigerians but observed that at every university it visited “a large number of candidates competing for admission into university are insufficiently equipped for it.”⁶⁰ According to the report, many students who secured admission into university had inadequate financial resources to complete their education: “they start on a degree course with just enough money to carry them through one session in the hope that once they are in the university a scholarship or bursary would be made available to them. When this hope fails, they leave the university without completing their course and their place is wasted.”⁶¹ The commission therefore recommended automatic scholarships for all indigent students.

The federal government released its white paper in 1964, detailing its decisions on the NUC report. In the paper, it decided to give the three regional universities 50 per cent of their capital grant of £17.63 million. While UNN and Ife received 30 per cent of their recurrent grant of £30 million, ABU received 50 per cent. Justifying this disproportionate allocation, the federal government noted that “75 percent of students in ABU came from outside the North whilst the North had not at present got as many students in other universities and that was likely to be the position for some time to come.”⁶² Besides, it noted that the financial relief for the North would enable it to “make available more funds for the provision of sixth forms in secondary schools and thus increase the number of potential entrants in Northern Nigeria.”⁶³ The white paper accepted the NUC report on awarding scholarships to all students and on enrolment in science courses but added that, out of the projected student population of 10,000, “7,580 should be taking courses in pure and applied sciences in view of the shortage of qualified Nigerians in those fields of study.”⁶⁴

The financial allocations in favour of the North demonstrate the federal government's awareness of the low number of high-level personnel from the region and its willingness to address it in the interests of promoting national unity. The data on registered high-level personnel by region show that the North, despite its large population, had the lowest number: the North, 54 (4.3%); the Federal Territory, 79 (6.3%); the East, 468 (37.0%); the West, 499 (39.5%), and the Mid-West 162 (12.8%).⁶⁵ These data show the regional imbalance that would remain a source of tension between the South and the North.

Why did the federal government favour courses in science and technology? The federal government's decision to train Nigerians in science and technology was a manifestation of the trend of thinking in the 1960s. The political elite and some scholars believed that the wonders of the Western world emanated from the sciences. Therefore, to sustain independence as well as justify it to Nigerians, the government hoped to train Nigerians in relevant skills vital in modernizing the economy. As a Nigerian scholar, Biobaku noted, "a developing country must modernize its economy in order to ensure growth and make its independence a reality."⁶⁶ The key, of course, was the provision of educated men trained in all disciplines but most importantly in science and technology. Moreover, university education was, unavoidably, in the frontline of government's efforts at modernization, and, as such, the emphasis on personnel training in science and technology served as a constant reinforcement of the need for investment in university education and the expansion of opportunities. In a convocation speech at UI in 1962, Nnamdi Azikiwe, the governor-general of Nigeria, gave this advice to graduating students: "In a technological age, the men who shape our destinies are men who create, and creation does not happen behind the desk or at the telephone but in the workshops of the firm, the laboratory and the virgin bush."⁶⁷

Azikiwe was not alone in linking higher education to the practical needs of Nigerian society. Balewa had also noted that the federal government emphasized science education to provide Nigerians with the kind of education that would produce citizens who "know how to think; and knowing how, do it."⁶⁸ He stressed that the best test of Nigerian universities would be in the "success with which they help the community to build the education they need to cope with their changing needs."⁶⁹ The

pronouncement of these leaders underscored the importance the federal government accorded to science education because of its place in facilitating the economic and technological development of the country. Yet the lingering educational legacy threatened the realization of mass university education and science education in the 1960s.

Colonial Legacy

Meeting the goal of economic development and nation-building in Nigeria through a policy shift towards mass education was farfetched in the 1960s. Indeed, the prevailing admission practices, inadequate sixth form facilities, insufficient and politicized scholarship awards, and regional political rivalries, as well as national conflict and the civil war undermined that goal. Thus, educational practices were in many cases reminiscent of colonial traditions. While political leaders professed their determination to realign postcolonial universities to meet specific national needs, their actions, just like those of colonial administrators, were often divorced from their words. In a sense, the elitism that characterized colonial higher education largely remained.

The admission practices of Nigerian universities, with few exceptions, followed the pattern of those of UCI in colonial Nigeria. In terms of admission requirements, the universities of Ibadan, Ife, Lagos, and Ahmadu Bello admitted candidates with the A-Level qualification or its equivalents. Candidates were required to pass five subjects at the General Certificate of Education (GCE), two of which had to be at Advanced Level, or four subjects, three of which had to be at Advanced Level. Students usually took these exams after completing a two-year program in secondary schools that had sixth forms; they were typically admitted by direct entry, spending only three years at university. These four universities also provided opportunities for concessional admission, which was available for candidates fresh from high school. Such candidates were required to have passed the GCE (Ordinary Level) in five subjects, including English and mathematics. They also sat for an entrance examination, and, if successful, took a one-year preliminary course before proceeding to a degree course. Those

admitted by this method were primarily in the sciences, medicine, and technology, due to insufficient enrolment in those courses.

The University of Nigeria, Nsukka, retained the same admission policy as that which obtained in UI, Ife, Lagos, and ABU in terms of direct entry requirements and course duration. In addition, students admitted by entrance examination took four years to obtain a degree in most subjects, excluding engineering, which took five. However, UNN differed from the others by requiring a minimum entrance qualification of passes in six subjects at GCE Ordinary Level (or five credits in the West African School Certificate), provided that students passed these subjects at one sitting and included a language and either mathematics or an approved science subject. The primary entrance qualification into Lagos, UI, Ife, and ABU was quite similar to that required for entrance into United Kingdom universities, whereas UNN's policy resembled the policy governing admission to universities in the United States of America. It was largely because of UNN's flexibility that its student enrolment rivalled those of UI, a much older institution. In fact, in the 1964/65 academic session, student enrolment at UNN was 2,482 while in other universities the numbers were lower: UI (2,284), ABU (719), Ife (659), and UNILAG (659).⁷⁰

One of the main driving forces behind the idea of concessional admission in UN, Ife, Lagos, and ABU and the Ordinary Level requirement at UNN was the lack of a sufficient number of sixth-form schools and teachers, especially in the science subjects. This situation clearly resulted in a huge shortage of students qualified for university education, especially in the sciences. Statistics from 1962 to 1968 reveal that students in the humanities outnumbered those in other fields, including the sciences.

These numbers fell below government expectations. The labour force projections indicated that at least 60 per cent of Nigeria's work force should have received at least a basic training in science and technology. As shown in Table 3.1, the enrolment situation was almost reversed, with an average of almost 60 per cent of students in the universities admitted in the liberal arts or social sciences. This statistic showed that the postcolonial curriculum reform had not yet met the expectations of the federal government, and a survey conducted by Fafunwa in 1964 confirmed the general dissatisfaction of Nigerians with the prevailing system of education.⁷¹ Disturbed by the report of this survey, the Joint Consultative Committee at its 1964

Table 3.1: Enrolment by Discipline.

Years	Humanities (%)	Science (%)
1962/63	56	44
1963/64	57	43
1964/65	59	41
1965/66	56	44
1966/67	54	46
1967/68	57	43

Source: Annual Review of Nigerian Universities: Academic Year 1967–68 (Lagos: Federal Ministry of Information, 1968), 27.

bi-annual meeting scheduled a national conference in 1965 to discuss the problem and come up with a national philosophy to guide educational development. But due to political unrest and the eventual outbreak of war, the conference date was postponed indefinitely.

Why did the universities' enrolments fail to satisfy government's expectations? K.O. Dike, the vice-chancellor of University of UN, stated that, besides the lack of adequate funds, which frustrated the introduction of courses in the applied sciences, such as engineering and food technology, the government's efforts to encourage the study of sciences at the primary and secondary school levels were inadequate. The result was that the majority of university applicants sought courses in the humanities. To meet the admission target in the sciences, Dike believed that government should begin at the primary and secondary school levels, for

until that is done, it would be difficult, indeed unrealistic, to accord the applied sciences the degree of emphasis that is now being demanded, no matter how strenuously the universities may be urged to alter their emphasis. If the schools persist in turning out a majority of students whose training is literary, the universities cannot turn out technologically minded students from such material.⁷²

The sixth form was increasingly being perceived by Nigerians as a blind copy of the British system and was thus blamed for the insufficient preparation of candidates for higher education in science disciplines. Most countries, except the United Kingdom and the former British African colonies, followed a four-year university course, which required passes in an examination at the Ordinary Level or its equivalent. Countries such as the USSR, the United States, Canada, Australia, India, and New Zealand required a good secondary school certificate and/or a pass in a university entrance examination.⁷³ Nigerian universities, except UNN, however, maintained an admission policy that required passes at Advanced Level GCE. Only in secondary schools with sixth forms could students prepare to take the advanced level exam. At independence, there were few such schools, which was why the Ashby Commission recommended their expansion to ensure an adequate supply of candidates for university education. Although the number of sixth formers qualified for direct entry into universities increased rapidly from 289 in 1960 to 1,190 in 1966, “university places available outpaced sixth form production by at least four times.”⁷⁴ Six years after releasing the report of the commission he chaired, Eric Ashby regretted the commission’s decision on sixth form:

It may turn out that this was an unwise decision. The consequences are already unfortunate: a valuable opportunity to provide flexibility in the educational system has been lost, and one university [UNN] has found it advisable to circumvent the rigidities of the British pattern of schooling by admitting students at O level.⁷⁵

Because the sixth form constituted a bottleneck to university expansion, the call to abolish it grew. Arikpo, the secretary of NUC, pointed out that the sixth form system was not in the best interest of Nigeria on either economic or educational grounds. He noted that the “inability to recruit qualified teachers, and the shortage of capital and recurrent funds, placed severe limitations both on increasing the number of sixth forms, and on improving those that already exist.”⁷⁶ Similarly, an editorial in the *West African Journal of Education* stated that the heavy capital and recurrent cost involved in sixth form expansion was unjustifiable, especially “at a time

when the staffing of the whole secondary school system cannot be regarded as satisfactory.”⁷⁷ It stressed that the “time has now arrived for a systematic evaluation of the sixth form and its place, if any, in the total educational system.”⁷⁸

In response to the growing campaign against the sixth form, the federal government set up a commission under the joint auspices of the NUC and the CVC to “review the place of the sixth form as preparation for university admission and for entry to other vocations” and to determine whether or not “the sixth form as now constituted does provide a satisfactory preparation for university admission.”⁷⁹ The commission was required either to make recommendations for its improvement “both in quantity and quality (content, structure and breadth) [or] to recommend alternative measures for the preparation of University entrants so as to maintain high academic standards in Nigerian universities.”⁸⁰ In its report, submitted in 1967, the commission observed that “there were not enough sixth form students at the HSC level to feed the universities and the universities had to rely on private students who sat for the GCE Advanced Level and school leavers from the fifth form who took the School Certificate examination.”⁸¹ The commission noted that “the sixth form as presently organized is wasteful and uneconomical” and therefore called for its abolition as an integral part of the secondary school.⁸² However, the commission advocated the temporary maintenance of concessional admission into universities, especially in the sciences, to remedy students’ deficiencies. This, it suggested, would be in the interest of national needs as long as “there continues to exist an insufficient supply of inadequately qualified entrants in the field of science and technology.”⁸³ Until the 1970s, this recommendation was not implemented, largely due to the civil war.

Another factor that affected access to universities was the candidates’ financial constraints. Data on government scholarship awards from 1960 to 1965 reveal that the federal government sponsored 895 students in the five existing universities; the regional governments, 1,245 students; other bodies, 1,042; and private students, 3,525. This brought the student population in all Nigerian universities to 6,707.⁸⁴ Compared to the demand for places, however, this number was small. It was ironic, as Dike observed, that in a land crying out for trained men and women with governments that established more universities to meet this national emergency, these

governments were “unwilling to award automatic scholarships to deserving students to enable them accept places offered them at Ibadan.”⁸⁵ For instance, during the 1962/63 session in UI, as Dike shows, 921 students gained admission but only 670 accepted the offer, mostly due to financial reasons. About 40 per cent of them were private students, and, according to Dike, judging from experience, many of them “may not pay their fees and therefore run the risk of expulsion.”⁸⁶

The most formidable obstacle to the postcolonial goal of using mass university education to forge a united Nigeria as well as advance economic development was the country’s unending inter-regional power tussle, which began in 1914 and has grown in intensity ever since. The university system was not immune to the national crisis that engulfed the country from 1964 to 1969. Since 1960, the fear of domination and deprivation had strained the relationship between the three regions. It was partly due to this fear that the independence constitution upheld the regional autonomy established during the colonial period. The first civilian administration in Nigeria, often termed the First Republic, operated a parliamentary system of government and a decentralized federation. That system emphasized regional autonomy as a way of allaying fears of domination and deprivation. Yet, national issues were purely viewed from parochial regional lenses. For instance, the first census conducted in postcolonial Nigeria in 1962 was cancelled due to heated controversy and accusations of falsifications in many areas. The second exercise, which took place in 1963, suffered the same fate. Although the census result was officially accepted, the South viewed the population of 25.86 million allocated to it and 29.80 million for the North as an insidious attempt by the North to gain national political advantage. Since population determined federal financial allocations and the number of political seats allocated to each region at the federal legislature, it was not surprising that census results would be a subject of high interest and debate.⁸⁷ Worse still was that the lingering crisis following the disputed elections of 1964 and the alleged massive corruption of political leaders at the federal and regional levels resulted in a military coup in January 1966 in which mostly prominent northern politicians, including Prime Minister Balewa, were killed. An Igbo major, Kaduna Nzeogwu, led the coup.

Although the coup was unsuccessful, the North was apprehensive of southern domination, as Major General J.T.U. Aguiyi-Ironsi, an Igbo, who was the top-ranking military officer, became the head of state. Northern misgiving was confirmed when Aguiyi-Ironsi's government adopted a unitary system of government for the country, a system that stripped the three regions of their autonomy. The new government identified education as a source of disunity and thus promulgated *Decree No. 1*, dubbed the "Unification Decree," which, among other things, aimed at reappraising educational policies to ensure high and uniform standards throughout the country as well as to re-orient universities to serve the genuine needs of the people.⁸⁸ The North, which had been educationally disadvantaged since the colonial period, had held strongly to political power at the federal level and maintained autonomy at the regional levels as a tool to overcome its educational imbalance. Aguiyi-Ironsi's centralization posture terrified northerners. As Welch and Smith put it:

Despite its size, the North feared the southern regions. This fear sprang largely from the limited educational and economic opportunities in the region. Preference for recruitment into the Northern Civil Service was given [to] Northerners, even with lower educational qualifications. Abolition of such preferences would close the major avenue by which Northerners could advance themselves.⁸⁹

Largely inspired by the fear of losing the autonomy and potential privileges northerners enjoyed (including in university education), another coup, spearheaded by northern military officers, overthrew Aguiyi-Ironsi's regime on 29 July 1966, six months after that regime came to power. Lieutenant Colonel (later General) Gowon, one of the leaders of the coup that saw the brutal assassination of Aguiyi-Ironsi, became the new head of state. Gowon suspended Aguiyi-Ironsi's unitary decree; a move the Igbos interpreted to mean that there was no basis for Nigerian unity. Colonel Odumegwu Ojukwu, the military governor of the East refused to accept Gowon's accession to power. The nation-building agenda of postcolonial Nigeria seemed threatened. To address the problem, Gowon convened the Ad Hoc Constitutional Conference in September to discuss a political

arrangement in Nigeria that would be acceptable to all the regions. The North, which pushed for a confederal system along with the Eastern Region at this conference, later supported a strong federal system along with the Western Region. The Eastern Region remained alone. Efforts at reconciliation, which occurred at many meetings, in and outside Nigeria, failed; worsened, of course, by the indiscriminate killing of Igbos in the North. About 80–100,000 Igbos were killed in the North between May and September 1966 in the wake of the Nzeogwu-led coup.⁹⁰ Gowon's inability to end the revenge killing of Igbo people in the North caused the Igbos to lose faith in the nation-building project, thereby providing the grounds for the Eastern Region to contemplate seceding from the country.

The financial and administrative autonomy enjoyed by the regions played a critical role in the political tension that engulfed Nigeria. In 1960, oil revenue contributed only 1 per cent of federal government revenue. It jumped to 18 per cent in 1966.⁹¹ Since the Eastern Region, which was the custodian to majority of Nigerian oil reserves, threatened secession, the federal government realized the revenue implications and thus moved to reduce the powers of the regions.⁹² Mainly in order to weaken the attempt at secession, as well as to curry the support of minorities in the regions, the federal government promulgated the decree titled *States (Creation and Transitional Provision) Decree No. 14 of 1967*.⁹³ This decree divided the country into twelve states. Before the decree, there were four regions, the Northern, Eastern, Western, and Midwest (created in 1964). With this decree, six states were created out of the Northern Region (North Central, North Eastern, North Western, Kano, Benue-Plateau, and Kwara); three were carved out of the Eastern Region (East-Central, South Eastern, and Rivers); two were formed out of the Western Region (Lagos and Western); and the Midwest Region became the Midwestern State.⁹⁴ Ojukwu resisted these geo-political changes, arguing that it was the responsibility of the regions to create states. These changes, however, did not prevent Ojukwu from pursuing the region's secessionist agenda. On 30 May 1967, Emeka Ojukwu proclaimed the independent Republic of Biafra. Swiftly the federal government declared war on the former Eastern region. A civil war ensued, lasting from 1967 to 1970. The nation-building project that mass education policies aimed to affirm was tested and failed. Various scholars

have acknowledged the devastation of the war and its impact on virtually all the future political decisions in Nigeria.⁹⁵

The civil war had implications for educational expansion. The nation-building agenda of mass university education failed as it did not prevent the war. The war diverted funds that would have aided educational growth, disrupted academic activities, especially in the east where school activities stopped, and further worsened the lingering regional competition and mistrust. Nowhere was the regional conflict more manifest, at least in the late 1960s, than the controversy surrounding the establishment of the Indigent Students Scheme. The scheme, initiated in 1967 by Obafemi Awolowo, was designed to address the financial hindrances to mass university education. In *Blue Print for Post-War Reconstruction*, Awolowo, who was the federal commissioner for finance and deputy chair of the federal executive council, stated that Nigeria was still “deficient in high-level manpower” partly because there were talented Nigerians who are “unable to obtain secondary as well as university education, simply because their parents are too poor to find the money.”⁹⁶ To remedy this situation, the federal government decided to provide money to those who were “unable to pay their fees.”⁹⁷

The implementation of the policy made the North uncomfortable. Northern leaders perceived the program as a deliberate ploy by the South to use the country’s national resources to sustain its lead in education. This caused resentment in the North, even among intellectuals. Ibrahim Tahir, a lecturer at ABU, argued against the scheme on the ground that it benefited one ethnic group in the South more than others.⁹⁸ Northern opposition to the scheme reached a crescendo when the vice-chancellor of Ahmadu Bello University, Ishaya Audu, called on the federal government to scrap the scheme and replace it with a loan scheme because only five students from the North benefited from it as opposed to numerous students from the South.⁹⁹ Commenting on the statement credited to Audu, the Indigent Student Association of the University of Ibadan said that it was “ironical that some intellectuals who had attained their present academic status through virtually free primary, post-primary and all higher learning now rejected the way by which they climbed.”¹⁰⁰ The student body declared that Audu was “arousing Northern movement against the South.”¹⁰¹ Although the federal minister of education, Wenike Briggs, dismissed Audu’s statements as “unfortunate” and reiterated the government’s support of the

scheme, the federal government still went ahead and cancelled the scheme in 1969.¹⁰² Since the head of state, Gowon, came from the North, it took little effort to persuade him to scrap the policy presumably to demonstrate his sympathy for the North.

Nigeria's postcolonial mass education policy of decolonizing the elitist British legacies in Nigeria's higher education made great progress in terms of enrolment (at least when compared to the colonial period). Yet it failed to satisfy rising demands for university education, let alone facilitate economic development and national unity. Between 1959 and 1969, student enrolment in Nigerian universities jumped from 939 to 9,695 students, excluding those at UNN, which was closed during the civil war.¹⁰³ That was a huge figure, even surpassing Ashby's proposed figures. When the Ashby Commission submitted its report in 1960, Nigerians perceived it as proposing a radical increase. However, the actual development of schools exceeded Ashby's recommendation of 7,500 students. Yet, in terms of the percentage of Nigerian in universities, the number was disappointingly low. While only 0.2 to 0.3 per cent of northerners were in the existing universities, for the rest of the country it was 0.5 to 0.6 per cent.¹⁰⁴

Although the period marked a significant improvement over the elitist British pattern, it also revealed a failure to accommodate the increasing demand for university education. For instance, at the University of Ife, while 10,518 students sought for admission between 1966 and 1969, only 1,924 were successful. At the University of Ibadan, while 14,048 students applied for admission between 1964 and 1970, only 2,882 secured places.¹⁰⁵ Similarly, educational expansion did not translate to high enrolment of students in the science and technology courses as anticipated in the first NDP. Moreover, even though government officers, policy-makers, and other proponents of change emphasized applied sciences and vocational subjects, the actual implementation of this policy, with the exception of UNN, did not support their pronouncements. In reality, there were fewer demands for graduates in the sciences compared to the humanities, law, and liberal arts. It seemed that politicians were interested in producing graduates to fill positions in the regional and federal civil service regardless of the course of study. Therefore, candidates made demands for liberal courses to which the universities responded. In addition, prominent Nigerians in leadership positions, including Azikiwe and Awolowo, were not scientists.

The kind of role models they provided favoured arts, humanities, and law. Also, high-level positions in the civil service went ‘crazy’ for BA holders and occasionally BSc holders. There was an unfounded notion that the best administrators were those who majored in liberal arts, social sciences, humanities, and law. Naturally, Nigerian parents pushed their children to emulate their leaders and follow their academic path.

The absence of an effective demand for science and technology courses also resulted from the fact that the government, as Dike argued, failed to invest in secondary school education in order to produce the required candidates for science courses. Moreover, the sixth form, inherited from the British, continued to hinder access. Even though the geographical spread of universities was intended to promote national unity, the implementation of some educational policies such as the Indigent Students Scheme clearly exposed the animosities that existed between the North and the South. Worse still, the civil war not only truncated the process of nation-building but also halted the expansion of educational facilities and opportunities. Given these problems, policy-makers and other Nigerians alike felt that the aims and objectives of university education remained unrealized. The 1960s therefore witnessed what Adaralegbe described as

a constant babble of voices as educators, parents, government functionaries, the laymen, scholars, and the press (with conflicting ideas) speak of the ills of our educational system and particularly the inadequacy of the school curriculum to develop individual Nigerians and the nation at the rate and tempo to put us on the World map.¹⁰⁶

Towards Centralization

The desire for a centralized and uniform coordination, expansion, and reform of universities was one of the major legacies of the civil war. That desire encouraged Gown to set up two commissions whose recommendations, apparently shaped by the experience of the civil war, dictated the country’s future educational direction, especially in the 1970s. The first commission was asked to review the country’s revenue allocation formula.

One of the implications of the creation of twelve states in 1966 was the importance of changing the pre-existing revenue allocation formula in which the former regional governments had considerable financial autonomy. In light of the new military posture favouring a more centralized control of all the states in the country, the federal government was compelled to set up a committee in 1968 to examine and suggest changes to the existing system of revenue allocation in the country. The committee, headed by I.O. Dina and dubbed the "Dina Committee," submitted its report in 1969. Basing its recommendations on the need to maintain unity, it requested the federal government to take custody of the revenue hitherto controlled by the former regions. The report stated:

The existence of a multiplicity of taxing and spending authorities with regard to the same revenue source or expenditure function not only generates major administrative problems, but also reduces the effectiveness of any fiscal coordination effort. This weakness is particularly manifest under planning conditions which require a positive integration of development planning and fiscal administration. The logic of planning renders invalid the dichotomy between public finance and development finance, and demands that revenue allocation be seen as an integral part of the later. Once it is accepted that the overwhelming social urge is for accelerated economic development as a major prerequisite for expansion of welfare services, then the point must be sustained that financial relations become only meaningful in the context of integrated development planning.¹⁰⁷

In this spirit, the report proposed that all Nigerian universities be financed 100 per cent by the federal government.¹⁰⁸ State officials, who wanted to have some degree of autonomy in financial matters, expressed strong opposition to the committee's recommendations. At their meeting in 1969, the commissioners of finance of all the states rejected the report.¹⁰⁹ Yet, as shown in chapter 4, and against the objections of the states, the committee's recommendations guided the federal government's post-1970 socio-economic policies, including university control and expansion.

The next attempt by Gowon to reposition education in order to realize its objectives was made in 1969. Since fighting had subsided during the civil war, the federal government through the chief federal adviser on education and head of the Nigerian Educational Research Council (NERC), S.J. Cookey, summoned a National Curriculum Conference (NCC) to study, among other things, the problems of higher education in Nigeria and search for solutions with a view to repositioning it to satisfy Nigeria's needs and expectations.¹¹⁰ Initiated by a group of highly influential American-educated Nigerians, including Babs Fafunwa and Adeneji Adaralegbe, co-sponsored by the federal government and some international organizations, and chaired by Cookey, the NCC was held in Lagos in September 1969.¹¹¹ The NCC attracted more than 150 participants, including experts and professionals, as well as representatives of trade unions, farmers, town unions, women's organizations, religious bodies, teachers' associations, university teachers and administrators, youth clubs, businesspersons, and government officials. The NCC was not for education specialists alone; the broad spectrum of participants represented the end users of education. As Cookey observed, "it was necessary also to hear the views of the masses of people who are not directly engaged in teaching or educational activities, for they surely have a say in any decisions to be taken about the structure and content of Nigerian education."¹¹²

The mood in the country was one of dissatisfaction with the prevailing system of education. The federal commissioner for education, W.O. Briggs, captured that mood by admitting the failure of the current educational system but then reaffirmed government support for mass education, science education, and education for national unity. According to Briggs, mass education was crucial so that "the masses of our people to understand the modern world in which they live, and take a lively, active and appreciative interest in the wonderful discoveries and inventions of man not only our youths but also adults."¹¹³ Regarding science, Briggs stressed that the present system of education had failed "because it has tended to produce an educated class of 'pen-pushers,' and because it did not lay the foundations of economic freedom by providing the manual skills and expertise for successful industrial and agricultural development."¹¹⁴ As he argued, "one of the consequences of this modern age of technology ... is the rising tide of automation."¹¹⁵ Thus, for Nigeria "to meet the needs of the machines

age, our workers must be flexible and versatile so as to be able to cope with the supervision, operations, repair, and maintenance of complicated and delicate equipment.”¹¹⁶ Furthermore, Briggs stressed that education was supposed to teach the principles of citizenship in order to promote national unity. He asked, “Could a better system of education have prevented it [civil war]? Can education remove its causes in our society and ensure stability? My answer to this question would be yes, for good education would include in its programme training for citizenship.”¹¹⁷

The federal government received the report of the conference in October 1969. Unlike the Ashby report, the document sought for the abolition of the sixth form, which Cookey described as “a blind copy of the British system; too narrow and inflexible.”¹¹⁸ In its place, it recommended a 6-3-3-4 system of education as provided in America. This involved six years of primary school; a two-tier system of secondary schooling divided into a three-year junior high school and a three-year senior high school with a direct transition to a restructured four-year university course.¹¹⁹ The document also emphasized the need to “educate [Nigerians] on a mass scale,” and unlike the Ashby Commission, proposed free education at all levels “to all those who can benefit from it.”¹²⁰ The report further cautioned that the modern Nigerian university should not remain an ivory tower any longer, even if it wished to do so; instead, the “Nigerian university must serve as an agent and instrument of change in bringing the fruits of modern technology and our rich cultural heritage to as many Nigerians as possible.”¹²¹ Even more important in light of the ethnic tension that caused the civil war, the report recommended that universities should take part in the process of national development and serve as a catalyst for national unity and change.¹²²

The major themes of the conference were educational expansion, self-reliance, national unity, and economic development. In calling for a restructuring of the Nigerian educational system along the lines of the American system, the report reflected the particular and active American influence of its conveners and sponsors. Since 1960, the American system of education had continued to be attractive to Nigerians. The British system, earlier held in high regard, increasingly lost its appeal. The climate that produced the recommendations reflected sensitivity to America’s lead in landing the first man on the moon on 20 July 1969. This event

dramatically heightened Nigeria's admiration of American degrees, and, as captured by E.O. Fagbamiye, "If the award of such degrees would ensure a technological break-through for Nigeria, many Nigerians would gladly support such awards."¹²³

Conclusion

The 1960s witnessed a noteworthy shift towards educational expansion following the recommendations of the Ashby Commission's report and motivated by the politics of economic development and nation-building. Five autonomous universities emerged, geographically spread to promote (though unsuccessful) national unity; scholarship awards (though inadequate) were extended by the various governments; science education was emphasized (without results); and the curriculum was diversified, leading to an increase in student population to 9,695. The smooth implementation of the massification program during this period was compromised by regional rivalries, financial constraints, the sixth form, the low demand for science courses, the military overthrow of the civilian government, and the civil war. The experience of the civil war, however, set the tone for the post-civil war expansion of university education, ushering in the second attempt at mass education in which rebuilding the country's economy and national spirit became an overriding social policy.

