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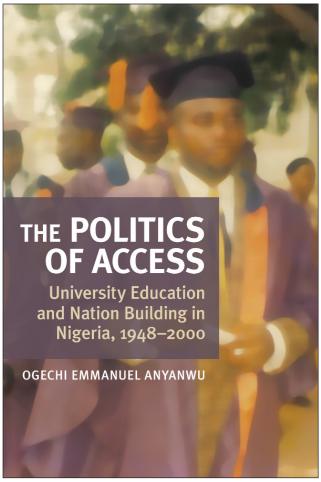

THE POLITICS OF ACCESS: UNIVERSITY EDUCATION AND NATION-BUILDING IN NIGERIA, 1948–2000

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6

Rationalization Policy: The IMF/World Bank and Structural Adjustment Program, 1984–90

> To speak of the expansion of the university system in any way now, is to ignore [Nigeria's] economic indicators. The choice must be in favour of the consolidation of means and of excellence as against mindless growth and dissipation of resources.
>
> – Yahaya Aliyu, 1985

Introduction

The push for mass university education under President Shehu Shagari coincided with Nigeria's economic decline of the early 1980s, which constrained further expansion of universities. Funding of existing institutions constituted a heavy burden on the country's lean resources. As the economic situation worsened, the Shagari administration approached the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for a loan, but before concluding the deal, a coup – led by General Muhammadu Buhari – overthrew the civilian government on 31 December 1983.[1] Among other things, the coup plotters bemoaned the poor state of the economy as well as the educational system. According to their spokesperson, Brigadier Sani Abacha (who later became president in 1993), Nigeria's "economy has been hopelessly mismanaged; we have become a debtor and beggar nation.… Our educational system is deteriorating at alarming rate."[2] The urgent task as the new administration saw it was to restructure the economy by reconsidering expenditure of social services, including on the universities.

Having inherited both an expanded university system and an ailing economy, the successive administrations of Buhari (1983–85) and Ibrahim Babangida (1985–90) faced a choice either to continue with the ambitious social programs of previous administrations in response to social demand or to check expansion. They chose the latter. Further establishment of universities ceased. Repositioning Nigerian universities to facilitate economic recovery and development became a more crucial element of the government's agenda. Rationalization policy, aimed at reducing subsidies on social amenities, sharing the cost of education with the public through tuition fees, and streamlining university courses to avoid duplication, was embraced. This chapter examines university development in the context of an economic downturn. It shows how the country's economic difficulties and the involvement of the IMF/World Bank gave rise to the structural adjustment dimensions of university policies in Nigeria and resulted in the period of restricted expansion of university education, 1984–90. As efforts at economic recovery assumed centre stage in the governments' national programs, the goal of using mass university education to foster national unity increasingly diminished. Instead, restructuring universities to address the country's economic problems, often neglected by previous regimes (in spite of their official pronouncements), gained prominence.

Buhari and the Search for Cost-Saving Measures

Rather than seek IMF and World Bank assistance, as Shagari had attempted in 1983, Buhari sought indigenous, self-directed economic belt-tightening measures. In carrying out this rationalization policy, the federal government squeezed financial spending on social programs, exchange rate, trade, and administration. Increases in taxes and drastic cuts in public spending were accompanied by losses of jobs in the public sector. In fact, more than one million public sector workers lost their jobs within twelve months of the regime.[3] For Nigeria, it marked a remarkable departure from the extravagant spending that had characterized the preceding governments, particularly since the 1970s.

Universities were not spared. Since independence, the government had been the sole funding source for university education. Therefore, it was not surprising that the economic recession would have far-reaching implications for the proper functioning of universities. It meant that the amount the government was prepared to allocate to education in a given year determined exclusively what they received. When the government could not meet the financial requirements of the university system, allocations declined. The impact of reduced funding in 1984 was immediate. For instance, the senate of the University of Ibadan resolved to postpone indefinitely the resumption date for the 1983/84 session because of what it described as a "very serious financial situation facing the university and its consequent inability to effectively perform its duties."[4] This scenario, as the *Daily Times* reported, applied to many Nigerian universities in the early months of 1984. It was a direct consequence of the vigorous funding of university expansion since the 1970s based largely on unreliable oil revenue. The decline in oil revenue and the resultant economic recession in the early 1980s, worsened by official corruption as well as the often-neglected mismanagement and misapplication of funds by university authorities, led to a drastic reduction in university funding.[5]

Rationalization was an attractive option in Buhari's efforts to control the process and rate of expansion based on its own criteria. Between December 1983 and August 1985, the Buhari administration took steps to manage university expansion while getting the public to share the burden of university education. Eager to avert expenses on social programs, the federal government revisited the National Open University (NOU) that had started operations in February 1984 amid mounting complaints of students over poor reception due to poor communication infrastructures.[6] Lacking funds to rectify this problem due to the economic meltdown, the federal government suspended NOU on 7 May 1984. The compelling reason was economic: the desire to avoid additional burden on the declining financial revenue of the government. As Buhari confirmed in the 1984 budget speech:

> The administration has given serious consideration to the National Open University Programme. Because the infrastructure to make the programme succeed is either not available or inadequate, the government has decided that in the present financial situation, Nigeria could not afford the Open University Programme.[7]

Buhari's crusade to rationalize universities and consolidate them for sustained growth manifested eloquently in its decision to restructure the existing federal universities of technology. According to a release issued in May 1984 by the Cabinet Office, Lagos, the federal government expressed its intention to merge four federal universities of technology with some conventional universities. The release questioned the rationale behind the continued maintenance of seven universities of technology in Nigeria "taking into account the need to provide a good quality technological education [and] the stark realities and socio-political circumstance of the country."[8] It noted, in addition, that the merging of the existing universities of technology was necessary since they operated at their "temporary sites, ill-equipped and lack[ed] basic facilities in terms of human and materials resources for achieving the objectives for which they were set up."[9] Accordingly, the federal government directed the Federal Ministry of Education in collaboration with the NUC and the affected universities to work out modalities for effecting the merger as well as for rationalizing university programs and courses to "create centers of excellence" and make them cost-effective and efficient.[10] The decision to merge four universities reflects the sober disposition of the new administration towards reducing government's financial burden.

In response to the government's directive, officials of the federal ministry of education, the NUC, and the federal university of technology met and agreed on 1 October 1984 as the effective date of the merger. They also prescribed the merger of four federal universities of technology in Abeokuta, Bauchi, Makurdi, and Yola with some conventional universities while retaining the ones in Akure, Minna, and Owerri.[11] The merged universities henceforth were to function as campuses of their foster universities, served by one council, one senate, and one chief executive vice-chancellor. By this decision, the number of federal universities in Nigeria went down from twenty to sixteen, and, together with state universities, there were now twenty-four universities in the country. Although the federal government justified its decisions on the need to provide good, quality technological education as well as the socio-economic circumstances of the country, given the declining revenue of oil, it was clear that economic justification was the most compelling.

Why the federal government chose to merge universities of technology instead of conventional universities seemed odd. This is especially so when the same federal government had proclaimed its desire to promote economic development, which would be attained through science and technology. The heavy cost of running universities of technology seemed to be a factor. However, if reducing the number of universities was the decisive consideration, there was no reason why the government would not administer all the Nigerian universities from one campus, just like the California State University that had more students scattered in various campuses than all the Nigerian universities.[12] By merging some universities, the government thought it would save money. Ironically, this arrangement did not change the status quo as NUC allocated funds directly to the affected universities without reducing cost for the government.[13]

Maintaining a free university education policy, which began in 1978, seemed unsustainable in the context of the declining economy. Reacting to the heavy cost associated with funding education, the minister of education, Ibrahim Abdullahi, complained that free education at the primary and secondary school levels throughout the country cost the government about ₦6 billion a year, excluding an estimated ₦674 million to fund one conventional university with 10,000 students.[14] The *Daily Times* editorial of 7 March 1984 urged the government to debunk the concept of government as a free education provider, stating that "the unrealistic idea of getting something for nothing has always been sold by politicians as a calculated ploy for winning votes, but has remained suspect nonetheless."[15] The benefits of a free education policy to any nation are incontestable, but the central issue in 1984 lay in the practical ability of the government to carry it through. For the first time, the public began to consider the concept of free education on its merits rather than as a political ploy.

In line with it rationalization agenda, the federal government issued a directive to the NUC in March 1984 to withdraw its subsidies on student feeding in order to save the government the cost of catering staff, cafeteria facilities, and food. The directive mandated federal universities to re-introduce accommodation fees to help defray the cost of hostel services.[16] Though state universities from their inception had charged minimal tuition fees ranging from ₦250 to ₦400, it had taken the federal government five years to implement the decision that President Obasanjo made in 1978 to re-introduce fees in the federal universities. Due to unrest in the universities, that decision was not implemented. The Shagari administration, motivated by the desire to fulfill election promises, complicated the funding problem by establishing more universities and continuing with a free university policy amid declining national revenue. Although Buhari introduced feeding and accommodation fees, tuition remained free, an issue his administration was eager to confront.

The federal government set up two study groups in 1984: one on funding of education and the other on curricula and development. The study group on funding advised government on a realistic funding of education based on the notion that education "should be the responsibility of the federal, state, and local government and parents, each contributing its share and conscious of the prevailing economic situation."[17] The government requested that the group specifically review, among other things, the existing arrangements for funding education at all levels and ascertain the extent of the financial involvement of the federal, state, and local government, and in light of the prevailing economic realities "propose an arrangement for funding education which would involve voluntary organizations, communities, individuals, and parents."[18]

In its report, the group acknowledged that universities had enjoyed a high priority in government spending compared to other levels of education during the preceding civilian era. For instance, in 1981, higher education alone claimed 65 per cent of the entire federal government recurrent expenditure on education, broken into 1.1 per cent for colleges of education and schools of basic studies, 6 per cent for polytechnics, and 57.9 per cent for the universities. Similarly, during the same year, federal government capital expenditure on education showed that higher education consumed 81.9 per cent. Universities claimed the lion's share of nearly 90 per cent of the allocated amount.[19] Identifying with the economic realities of the country and responsive to the mindset of the federal government that set it up, the group declared that "the beneficiaries of higher education in Nigeria should be partners with government in funding education."[20] It recommended payment of fees in all institutions of higher learning, award of scholarships to about 10 per cent of new entrants on academic merit, especially for students in courses designed for national emergency (e.g., tertiary science teachers' education).[21]

The curricula committee that Buhari set up reviewed university curricula with the view of addressing the high level of graduate unemployment in the country.[22] Members for this study were drawn from the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology; Employment, Labour and Productivity; Manpower Board; and the National Universities Commission.[23] In its report, the committee called for changes in university curriculum that would privilege the funding of science courses. The thinking was that since Nigeria lived in an era of global economic recession and limited financial resources, one option open to graduate job seekers was self-employment. It suggested the overhauling of university curricula to reflect the need for self-employment by graduates based on the "changing structure of the society."[24] In addition, it called for a limitation on the number of students in the arts and humanities. The idea was to hold up the rate of expansion of university education in those disciplines because it far outstripped the rate of employment of graduates. This recommendation was based on the assumption that graduate unemployment was the result of the over-production of graduates in the arts and humanities, which explained why it demanded that

> government should through the instrumentality of the National Universities Commission (NUC) considerably slow down the rate of increase in university student enrolment in the Arts and Humanities to not more than 10% per annum in contrast to slightly over 20% annual increase recorded during the 1978/79–1980/81 period.[25]

The committee stipulated a 60:40 admission ratio in favour of science-based disciplines. To control expansion, the committee advised the government to ban the establishment of new universities (whether federal or state) during the next five years. In addition, the committee called for the phasing out of the following courses from university curricula: classical and African religious studies in the universities of Ibadan and Ife; language (German, Portuguese, French, and Russian), Arabic, and Islamic studies in all the universities offering them; and the newly established law faculties in the universities of Ibadan and Ilorin. It insisted that that graduate output in law, library studies, geology, geophysics, and pharmacy should be kept at the 1983 level, and no other university should start courses leading to the award of degrees in law.[26] To underscore its bias in favour of science courses, the committee urged the government to tie financial allocation to the universities to specific courses and projects, particularly in the sciences.[27] Finally, it emphasized that the universities should intensify their efforts at internal revenue-generating activities such as corporate consultancy services and investments to reduce their financial dependence on the government.[28] Except for Mrs. O.F. Okusami, who represented the NUC, the university community was absent. This was odd, given the fact that the committee's resolutions would not just have a potential effect on university education but would be implemented ultimately by the university community.

The driving force behind the attempt to reorganize the university curriculum was the mistaken perception that Nigeria's higher educational system was lopsided in favour of liberal courses that were scarcely needed by a developing country like Nigeria. The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) faulted this thinking when it asserted that government's move was a "very transparent attempt to cover up the obvious failure of the neocolonial economy that Nigeria is operating."[29] This claim on the part of authorities, according to ASUU, would only hold water if graduate unemployment was limited to graduates of arts disciplines and spared graduates of science disciplines. As ASUU revealed, graduates of all disciplines roamed Nigerian streets "wearing the soles of their shoes out in search of jobs that are unavailable because of the bankruptcy of the economic system which the imperialists imposed on us and which, rather unintelligently, are maintained."[30] That unemployment existed among graduates in those disciplines most needed for economic development meant that the curriculum review was a misplaced exercise intended to shift the blame onto the educational sub-system. As ASUU warned, "enough of these diversionary tactics, this movement in circles, this running after shadows, this avoidance of the heart of the matter."[31]

Likewise, the Committee of Vice-Chancellors (CVC) rejected parts of the report dealing with phasing out selected courses in some universities. Since French-speaking countries surrounded Nigeria, CVC reasoned that it was in the long-term interest of the country to emphasize the French language. The CVC also noted that many of the recommendations of the group were short-sighted, stressing that they were "induced by panic and solely on considerations of the present economic situation."[32] In spite of criticisms of the proposed curriculum reform, and to underscore its resolve to carry on with the rationalization policy, Buhari promulgated Decree No. 16 of 1985 on Education (National Minimum Standards and Establishment of Institutions). The decree empowered the NUC to set minimum standards for all academic programs currently taught in Nigerian universities, mandating the NUC to undertake periodic accreditation visits to universities to determine the viability of programs run in all Nigerian universities, not only to ensure maintenance of minimum standards, but also to guide government in allocating funds.

The recommendations made by the committees on funding education and curricula understandably followed Buhari's austerity and stabilization measures. The objective was to curtail government expenditures on social services, save money to service external debts, and ultimately avoid external assistance from world bodies such as the IMF and the World Bank. Without entering into agreement with the IMF, however, the federal government did not reschedule its debt service payments; it partially serviced the debt. With unpaid interest, arrears on external debt built up and the stock of debt grew fivefold. Nigeria's economy, including universities, suffered under the weight of the austerity program.[33] High inflation became a common economic outcome of Buhari's economic program while government subvention to federal universities declined. With sustained decline in the capital and recurrent subvention to federal universities between 1984 and 1985, universities were compelled to search for alternative sources of funding.[34] Under the caption "Varsities in Search for Funds," the *Daily Times* commended the efforts of the universities of Nigeria, Nsukka, and Ilorin for embarking on profitable commercial ventures such as university bookshops and printing presses, guest houses, pilot bakery projects, commercial farms, gas stations, and consultancy services.[35] In 1985, the University of Maiduguri launched its consultancy services centre.[36]

Buhari's austerity and stabilization measures brought untold hardships, not only to the university system, but also to Nigerians, as inflation, hunger, and unemployment continued to rise. His administration failed to either restructure the economy or cushion the effects of the government's severe 'belt-tightening' programs. Worse still was that he operated a command economy with an extensive system of direct controls that suppressed meaningful market activities, discouraging private sector involvement. Import shortages and scarcity of food items led to rising social and political discontent. Nigerians groaned under Buhari's regime, giving an incentive to some discontented and ambiguous military officers, led by Ibrahim Babangida, to stage a coup that ousted the Buhari regime on 27 August 1985. The justification for the coup was obvious: "The present state of uncertainty and stagnation cannot be permitted to degenerate into suppression and retrogression."[37]

Babangida, IMF, and Universities

The economy that Babangida inherited was characterized by huge foreign and domestic debts, a rapidly declining per capita income, a high rate of unemployment, severe shortages of raw materials and spare parts for industries, and a high rate of inflation.[38] In his first address to the nation, Babangida stressed the need to depart from the limited economic policy of the ousted regime. As he noted: "It is the view of this government that austerity without structural adjustment is not the solution to our economic predicament. The present situation whereby 44 per cent of our revenue earning is utilized to service debts is not realistic."[39] He therefore promised to take steps "to ensure comprehensive strategy of economic reforms."[40] To continue to fund university education adequately, as well as other social programs, Babangida faced three policy options: (1) maintain the status quo (which meant a continuation of the austerity measures without structural adjustment reforms); (2) accept IMF Structural Adjustment Facility, including its conditions; (3) adopt a modified variant of the traditional structural adjustment package, designed and implemented by Nigerians.[41]

Weighing its options carefully, the new government still faced the reality that it's "survival hinged on the availability of revenues, which in turn depended upon its ability to negotiate a rescheduling of debt service payments."[42]

Very early in his regime, Babangida opened a public debate on IMF, focusing on whether the government should accept the IMF loan or not. Public mood, as expressed in news media reports, called on the government to reject the IMF loan. Overwhelming support seemed to be directed toward adopting 'homegrown' adjustment measures aimed at economic recovery. Pretending to acquiesce to public pressure, Babangida declared a fifteen-month national economic emergency. [43] As he later elaborated in his 1985 budget speech, such a move would allow the country time to reflect on the social and economic problems facing the country and to seek solution through indigenous efforts. Such efforts, he noted, would be "at our own pace and our volition, consistent with our own voluntary national interest."[44] In his search for homegrown efforts at national development, Babangida found the doctrine of rationalization an attractive policy in educational planning and thus revisited the recommendations of the committee on curriculum reform that the Buhari administration had not implemented before it was overthrown. In an address to members of the university community in November 1985, Babangida endorsed rationalization policy and emphasized the historic role of the universities in not only championing economic development but aiding economic recovery. He therefore called on universities not to remain a burden to the state but "to examine and reconsider aspects of the administration and financing of university education."[45]

Contrary to its earlier promises of exploring homegrown economic policy, Babangida introduced the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) in June 1986. Even though SAP was a core part of the IMF reform package, official rhetoric, however, insisted that it was homegrown. In launching the program, Babangida praised Nigeria's "international creditors" for appreciating the country's "commitments in the path of agro-structural adjustment which we have started for ourselves."[46] He added that the IMF recognized and agreed with his "position not to take the IMF loan, and not to devalue the naira overnight."[47] Unlike the economic measures adopted by the preceding administration, SAP aimed to promote "restructuring and diversifying the productive base of the economy in order to reduce its dependence on the oil sector and on imports and achieving in the short to medium term fiscal and balance of payments viability."[48] Other objectives of SAP were to lay "the basis for a sustainable non-inflationary growth; and reducing the dominance of unproductive investments in the public sector, and improving that sector's efficiency and enhancing the potential of the Private Sector."[49]

Notwithstanding official pronouncements, the SAP was far from being an indigenous initiative. The major reason for its adoption was to open the door to official debt rescheduling, a topmost priority of the government. It was not surprising that the federal government soon entered into three standby arrangements with the IMF under a five-year plan (1986–91). Under the arrangement, agreement was reached on three debt rescheduling agreements with the Paris Club of creditor countries: (a) a 1986 agreement that rescheduled/refinanced debt worth about US$4.6 billion; (b) a 1989 agreement that rescheduled about US$5.2 billion; and (c) a 1991 agreement that rescheduled about US$3.3 billion.[50] Ultimately, the World Bank also supported the adjustment program through a US$450 million trade policy and export diversification loan.[51] One of the major implications of introducing SAP was that the federal government cut its funding of university education since the program required government to reduce spending on social services, including education.

The Fifth National Development Plan (Fifth NDP), launched in 1986, reflected the character of SAP by requiring governments to avoid further establishment of institutions of higher learning, stressing that the existing institutions would undergo internal structural reforms intended to improve their operational efficiency and effectiveness.[52] The Fifth NDP echoed the prevailing official government's mindset; it was austere and less grandiose than its immediate predecessor was. This ideological shift had a profound impact on all sectors of the economy, especially higher educational institutions that had until then run on a non-competitive and non-profit basis. Rationalization, consolidation, and effectiveness – supported by the IMF – were the key words of the Fifth NDP, dictating subsequent steps taken by the federal government on university expansion.

It must be stressed that the IMF and the World Bank had pushed for rationalization of African universities since the late 1970s when many

African countries suffered severe economic decline. At the meeting of African vice-chancellors in Harare in 1986, for instance, the World Bank representatives argued that higher education in Africa was a luxury and that African countries were better off closing universities at home and training graduates overseas. Since the World Bank understood this call to be politically untenable, it instead urged African leaders to trim and restructure their universities to produce only those skills that the "market" required.[53] Given that the Nigerian economy needed more science graduates to help facilitate economic development and recovery, Babangida found the World Bank advice attractive. During the Silver Jubilee Celebration and Twenty-first Convocation of the UNN on December 6, 1986, Babangida stressed his government's preference for science courses because of their crucial role in national development. According to him,

> while numbers are still important, in this era of science and technology, quality has now assumed greater significance [and] emphasis would henceforth have to be shifted to science and technology, and to quality.[54]

With SAP in place, the rationalization program seemed unstoppable and universities prepared for it. Following a federal government directive on the review of the curricula report, the federal ministry of education had formed a ministerial committee in February 1986 under the leadership of Professor Akin O. Adesola, the vice-chancellor of the University of Lagos. The committee was charged with the responsibility of converting into a White Paper the recommendations of the study group on curricula for the consideration of the minister of education and the federal executive council.[55] As part of the review of university curricula, and in anticipation of rationalization of university programs, the executive secretary of the NUC and the chair of the CVC travelled to the UK between 30 March and 5 April 1987 to "gain a first hand knowledge of the British Universities scene and in particular to find out how the universities have responded to rationalization and continuous shortage of funds for their operations."[56] Under the program in the UK, the Thatcher government had cut financial allocations to the universities in 1979, almost forcing them to close down. However, the universities came back strong through commercialization of their entire operations.[57] Managers of university education in Nigeria believed that they would gain useful insights from the British experience, which would help them to handle Nigeria's impending rationalization policy.

The trip involved a series of meetings, which revealed the potential steps Nigerian universities would take to respond proactively to rationalization. For instance, at the meeting with the University Grants Committee (UGC) on March 30, N.T. Hardyman, the Secretary of the Committee, informed the visitors that the initial cuts in the financial allocations to British universities were a reduction in the 'value' of the grants.[58] According to him, the British government justified the cuts based on the philosophy of making the universities 'leaner and fitter.'[59] As he further recounted, the negative result of rationalization was that for the first time since the Middle Ages student numbers were cut in British universities. In order to allow the universities to survive, the UGC in 1984 came up with a strategy of saving universities from further financial cuts by recommending the closure of one or two of them.[60] At the meeting with Dr. J.B. Lowe, the secretary and registrar of St. Andrews University, it was stated that the commercial projects embarked on by the university could serve as a model for Nigeria.[61] Similarly, Professor Ashford, vice-chancellor, University of Salford, stressed the need for vigorous fund-raising through a strong managerial ethos.[62] This visit showed that, under rationalization, universities would not survive unless they became innovative and less dependent on the government for financial support.

The World Bank and the White Paper on University Reform

The federal government had invited the World Bank study group to carry out a study on how to salvage the deteriorating conditions in Nigerian universities and advise it on the most cost-effective way of running federal universities.[63] The group conducted its fieldwork in early 1987 and submitted its report to the government in October 1987. The report observed that, despite the tremendous expansion of the university system since 1960, higher education in Nigeria faced a crisis largely due to the unplanned, ad-hoc expansion of enrolments, universities, and faculties during periods of peak oil revenues, resulting in higher overall costs and unit costs. The report revealed two areas of excessive costs: the proportion of expenditures devoted to administration, and the high costs of running postgraduate programs in all subjects at all universities, even when there were few students in each course.[64] The study found that Nigerian universities spent about 46–57 per cent of their allocations on administration and much less on teaching.[65]

The World Bank report endorsed the doctrine of rationalization. Largely echoing the spirit behind SAP, it recommended the freezing of a number of departments and faculties in all federal universities. It also urged the closure of all postgraduate programs where enrolments failed to reach a cost-effective level; an increase in the number of courses for which an economically feasible level of fees can be charged, and the gradual introduction of tuition fees to cover 15 to 20 per cent of the unit recurrent cost. To encourage the study of science, it asked the government to charge a lower percentage of total costs for students in priority science fields and a higher percentage for those in non-priority arts fields as well as 100 per cent of direct teaching costs for all postgraduate students. It also requested government to charge user fees for housing, schools, water, health services, and so forth. Finally, it called for frequent workshops to be conducted on how the university system and its functions could be rationalized so as to become less of a burden on federal and state budgets, while maintaining or even improving quality and effectiveness.[66] The report, above all, indicated the World Bank's readiness to grant Nigeria a loan to help it consolidate the quality and effectiveness of university education.

Rationalization of universities, as endorsed by the World Bank, was a highly discussed issue in 1987. It dominated the proceedings of the international seminar sponsored by the NUC, the CVC, and the British Council titled, "Management of University Resources." In his address at the seminar, the federal minister for education, Jibril Aminu, highlighted the government's resolve to pursue the policy, indicating that the anticipated government white paper on curriculum reform would reflect that.[67] Additionally, all universities, as the communiqué issued at the end of the CVC meeting indicated, would be required to draw up plans of rationalization of academic programs that would remove duplication of similar courses within and between universities and provide modalities for phasing out, where necessary, programs that were neither attractive to students nor relevant to the economy.[68] It also subscribed to the government's vision of the university as contained in Aminu's speech and emphasized the need for universities to explore alternative sources of funding as well as the need for industries to support the rehabilitation of university education.[69]

After due consultation, the federal government released the White Paper on higher education curriculum and development in December 1987. The paper reflected both the objectives of SAP and the observations and recommendations of the World Bank study group. It expressed the federal government's acceptance of the principle of rationalization as a blueprint in developing Nigerian universities "in view of the present economic recession and the scarcity of funds."[70] The paper endorsed the vigorous pursuit and implementation of the 60:40 admission ratio in favour of sciences by both federal and state universities because of the importance of sciences in technological development. It therefore required universities to submit a schedule for achieving that ratio by the year 1990. Despite government's stringent measure, it still wanted the expansion of university education in response to public demand. But this time, expansion must be controlled. To that end, the white paper approved 2.5 per cent and 10 per cent overall growth for older universities and younger universities respectively. In addition, it approved 15 per cent overall growth for the federal universities of technology (FUT), including four campuses/colleges resulting from merger of four former FUT.[71] For state universities, it directed the NUC to ensure that they adopt the same principles in their development.

Directing the universities to draw up a plan of rationalization, the federal government empowered the NUC through Decree No. 16 to regulate the establishment of courses and standards in all universities.[72] The NUC was to determine that by having a "complete inventory of facilities available in various faculties and departments of universities … and draw proposals for broad areas of concentration [forming] the nucleus of the concept of centers of excellence."[73] These directives were inspired by economic considerations occasioned by SAP. It provided the federal government the opportunity to slow down the rate of growth in Nigerian universities, especially in the arts. In his address at the 11th Annual Seminar of the Committee of Vice-Chancellors on the theme *Mobilizing Nigeria's Education Towards Technological Self-Reliance*, the president charged the universities to help champion economic development and economic recovery.[74] He insisted that universities would do that by supporting the government's policy on science and technology and by being mindful of the need for Nigeria to take its rightful place in science and technology among advanced countries in the twenty-first century. As Babangida stated:

> [Nigeria] cannot continue to depend indefinitely on the advanced countries for our technological needs. In our attempt to achieve self-reliance, we have taken a number of measures, one of which is to encourage our universities to restructure their programmes to make them more relevant to the needs of the nation. This need to be self-reliant is very pressing now – perhaps more so now than it has been at any other time. The economy is in a bad shape, occasioned by the international economic crisis, and, yet, as a nation, we cannot afford to be left behind in the march towards technological advancement.[75]

The vision of expanding access to science students seemed unrealistic unless facilities in the existing university could accommodate them. The aggregates data for the entire 1978/79–1984/85 period revealed that, out of 1,151,018 who sought university admission, less than 12 per cent secured admission.[76] Percentages of admissions spread across disciplines reveal shortages of university places in all areas. Education ranked highest (18.0%); Arts (17.0%), Science (15.3%), and Social Sciences (14.5%) followed it. Engineering and Technology achieved an 11.8 per cent admission rate while the corresponding figure for Medicine was 11.0 per cent. The admission rate for the discipline of Law, which ranked second in the level of applications, was only 5.6 per cent or eight out of nine in terms of ranking.[77] These numbers show that the demand for university places in all the disciplines was higher than its supply, and so there was need for more places as well as more courses to satisfy demand. In that sense, rationalization threatened access to university education. As Festus Iyayi puts it, the solutions are far from "programme closures, mergers or concentration with their attendant and apparent implications for reduced student enrolment in the universities, but the expansion of existing programmes and opening of new ones to ensure that a greater level of demand is satisfied."[78] Moreover, government's insistence on 60:40 for science and arts courses seemed doomed to be unsuccessful without addressing the root of the problem – funding science education in primary and secondary schools. Since the 1960s, the governments had failed to make an adequate effort to invest in science subjects at the primary and secondary schools, thus accounting for the continued low demand for science courses at the university level. The existing secondary schools were ill-equipped to produce scientifically minded candidates for university education. As a professor B.I.C. Ijeomah noted,

> Even with the best legislation, unless the primary and secondary schools are science oriented, unless technocratic consciousness permeates the home, primary and secondary levels, unless the teachers themselves *ab initio*, think and teach scientifically the 60–40 ratio will remain a twentieth century mirage.[79]

Although the development of universities in the late 1980s was sensitive to the needs of the economy, the emphasis on sciences generated constant debate because of the feeling that discrimination in favour of science and technology courses was not a guarantee to economic development. Indeed, government's efforts to train more technocrats to the neglect of the bureaucrats, as Ijeomah noted, "would breed incompetence in the management of human resources."[80] Moreover, the emphasis on science and technology, he insisted, "is the tragedy of modem trend in university education."[81] The White Paper, however, believed otherwise, insisting that the lopsided university enrolment in favour of arts-related disciplines was laying the foundation to development. In line with the new attitude of the administration, Babangida revisited the federal universities of technology that were merged by his predecessor. The six-man committee he appointed under the leadership of Professor Nurudeen Adedipe, had the responsibility of making recommendations on demerging the campuses at Yola, Bauchi, Makurdi, and Abeokuta from the conventional universities, as well as considering the possibility of converting two into specialized universities of agriculture mindful of its financial, physical, and academic implications.[82]

After conducting a study of all the federal universities of technology, the Adedipe-led committee discovered that nothing had really changed for the better after the merger of the four universities. On the contrary, the committee noted that the merger promoted "high administrative cost and the risk to life and property occasioned by physical separation by long distances involving frequent commuting of staff between them and foster Universities."[83] According to the committee, despite the merger, the NUC had continued to fund the merged universities thus ensuring that they retained their financial autonomy while bearing the names of their parent universities.[84] Acting on the committee's report, the federal government restored the former federal universities of technology at Bauchi and Yola to their autonomous status in 1988 and re-established those in Abeokuta and Makurdi as specialized universities of Agriculture.[85] With the demerging of four former universities in Yola, Bauchi, Makurdi, and Abeokuta and the establishment of the University of Abuja (UA) in 1988, the number of universities in Nigeria returned to thirty-one.

The federal government had established UA based on the recognition that Abuja, the new federal capital of Nigeria, required an institution of higher learning that would cater to the educational needs of the inhabitants of the territory in particular and the nation in general. Given the poor state of the economy, the founding of UA was not immediate. In fact, it took the federal government two years to establish the minimum necessary facilities for the university to open for academic activities in 1990 at its temporary campus located in Gwagwalada. This was even as Babangida created two additional states in the country, which shortly began to push for a university.[86]

The Impact of IMF/World Bank Policies on Universities

Since the introduction of SAP in 1986, allocation to universities declined even as inflation continued to rise. In 1986 the federal universities requested the sum of ₦720,922,533 but received only ₦347,940,519. In 1987 and 1988, while the universities requested ₦731,077,751 and ₦805,284,664, the federal government allocated ₦270,356,000 and ₦434, 356, 000 respectively.[87] Shortfalls in allocations led to the suspension of further expansion of facilities and the gradual decay of existing facilities due to lack of maintenance. Concerned that the universities could not properly function let alone fulfill the responsibilities outlined by the president, given the crippling effects of under-funding, the Vice-Chancellors of Nigerian universities sent a delegation to the president in 1988 to demand more funds. Adamu Nayaya Mohammed, chairperson of the CVC and the leader of the delegation, notified the president of the dilemma facing Nigerian universities. He asked,

> Given the increasing number of potential University students, the shortage of financial resources and the necessity for redefinition of the contents, distribution and method of delivery of academic programmes, what should we do in the universities in order to survive and ensure that the system is sustained?[88]

Though the president seemed sympathetic, he did not make a commitment to increase funding but lent his support for a World Bank loan for the education sector.[89] The loan aimed to make foreign exchange available for the provision of facilities such as library books, journals, provision and maintenance of science-related equipment, and completion of abandoned academic facilities.[90] This loan satisfied government's notion of quality education as opposed to mass education. It aimed at equipping the federal universities with quality laboratories and research facilities, especially to champion the country's scientific and technological development.[91] As a condition for the extension of the loan (called eligibility criteria), the World Bank demanded that universities implement the recommendations outlined in the government white paper on curricular reform by reducing all the uneconomical and unviable faculties and departments and remove some support and administrative staff. In addition, they were required to raise postgraduate fees, make hostels self-financing, and increase revenues from non-governmental sources.[92] The World Bank extended a credit of $120 million, dubbed the Federal Universities Development Sector Adjustment Credit.[93] The credit was the Bank's first attempt to assist major university reform in sub-Saharan Africa, targeting Nigeria, the country with the largest university system in Africa.[94] It came at a time of low supply of university places and declining government financing caused by the sharp fall in petroleum prices.

By pushing a structural adjustment of universities as a condition for the $120 million loan, the World Bank reaffirmed its faulty and questionable position on limited investment in higher education. Since the 1970s, the World Bank had advised African governments to redirect funds from their "incompetent, inefficient, and inequitable" higher education to basic education, and allow privatization to fill the gap.[95] Drawing on social rates of return analyses to emphasize the importance of basic education, it insisted that it was more productive for African countries to invest their meagre resources in primary and basic education. Nigeria rightly resisted the pressure to give in to World Bank prescriptions in the 1970s and early 1980s because resources were available to fund educational expansion at all levels. The federal and state governments sought to provide as many young people as possible access to primary, secondary, and higher education. However, in 1986, when the government of Babangida was in dire need of World Bank/IMF assistance to resolve its balance of payment deficits, it accepted their conditions, which stipulated diverting resources from higher education. This thinking consequently guided post-1986 higher education policies as state support for higher education declined. University education became one of its casualties "for it was said to be an expensive luxury."[96] In his study, Sadique revealed that the World Bank influenced the federal government in reallocating resources in order to shift emphasis from arts and humanities to science, engineering, and accountancy. He further reported that the bank even insisted on choosing the contractors who were to supply the needed materials such as books, journals, and laboratory consumables, and that all of these contractors were foreign companies.[97] World Bank's selfish neo-colonial interest is quite evident here.

The drastic reduction in university funding had negative consequences on the university system. Expansion of facilities halted while enrolment grew faster than the absorptive capacity of the universities. The result was overcrowding, infrastructural decay, and an unfriendly learning environment for both students and faculty. Besides, irregular payment of faculty salaries created related problems as faculty either took on part-time jobs or accepted bribes from students. The quality of education received by the students declined considerably, compromising the relevance of higher education to societal needs. In its 1989 annual conference on the theme "The Role of Universities in National Recovery," the CVC blamed the SAP for the fate of universities.[98] Proper funding of universities was essential to their smooth development. Denying them funds badly disorganized the universities' central operation and consequently produced an agitated academic climate. As Ray Ekpu confirmed,

> This cash crisis has resulted in jammed classrooms, suffocating hostel accommodation, congested laboratories and empty libraries.… These pressures on facilities are not merely physical, they are psychological as well. They raise the blood pressure of teachers and the taught and render them easily irritable, frustrated, angry, and the cumulative effect of these pressures is that if a little match is struck they catch fire.[99]

Many university teachers left for the private sector due to their frustration with government's inability to address problems in the universities. Others went overseas for higher salaries and better conditions of service, a phenomenon called 'brain drain.' The presidential committee on brain drain, set up in February 1989 to examine the problem, defined it as "the departure of highly trained professionals, intellectuals, talents and specialists in any field of endeavor … as a result of frustration from poor or inadequate remuneration, or from not having opportunities to fulfill professional aspirations in the given social context."[100] The committee's report revealed a sustained exodus of intellectuals from Nigerian universities from 1987 to 1990. For instance, data from seven universities indicate that 45 left from the sciences while 37 left from the arts in 1987/88 session. In 1988/89 session, 82 left from the sciences while 43 left from the arts. In 1989/90, 46 left from the sciences and 90 from the arts.[101] As the *Report of the Study Group Submitted to The World Bank Project Implementation Unit* noted, the departing faculty were dissatisfied with the "ghetto-like work environment characterized by inadequate facilities (offices, lecture and seminar rooms, lecture theatres, laboratories, water, electricity) and short supplies in equipment, reagents, current books and journals, teaching/learning resources and basic furniture."[102]

An *African Concord* editorial of 25 September 1989 reported that in Obafemi Awolowo University (former University of Ife) many academic departments were in danger of being closed down because of the mass departure of lecturers and the devaluation of the naira.[103] Though the annual student population increase in the universities was low, faculty increase was far lower. While student enrolment in universities grew at an annual rate of 7 per cent, the academic staff numbers increased by only 2 per cent. Academic staff strength increased as follows: 8770 in 1984/85; 9014 in 1985/86; 9103 in 1986/87; 9216 in 1987/88; 9547 in 1988/89; and 9621 in 1989/90.[104]

The impact of rationalization of policies of the Babangida regime was largely felt in university admissions. Annual enrolment rate between 1986 and 1990 dropped significantly. It was 10.9 in 1986, but later dropped as follows: 6.7 in 1987/88; 7.2 in 1988/89; and 4.9 in 1989/90.[105] Although the number of students rose from 116,822 in 1983 to 180,871 in 1990, that number was still insignificant, given the huge population of Nigerians within the eligible university age group between fifteen and twenty-five years.[106] That age group, according to Sam Aluko, a top Nigerian economist, constituted about 25 per cent of the total population of Nigeria.[107] This means that only 0.8 per cent of them were in school in 1990. Compared to other countries, Nigeria fell below Kenya's 2 per cent; Ghana, Liberia, Zambia, and Ivory Coast's 4 per cent; Morocco's 8 per cent; and Egypt's 15 per cent. It was 18 per cent in the Philippines, as well as in most Latin American countries such as Brazil, Colombia, Nicaragua, Ecuador, and Guatemala.[108] However, in keeping with government science policy, enrolments in science courses slightly surged between 1984 and 1990. Students in the sciences and related courses were more than those in the arts. While the number of students in arts-related courses increased from 60,818 in 1984/85 to 81,339 in 1989/1990, enrolment in science-related courses increased from 52,920 to 91,736 during the same period.[109] While these statistics suggest that government's efforts at promoting science courses yielded dividends, ironically, there was more graduate output in the arts than in the sciences. Graduate output in science-related courses increased from 11,403 in 1984/85 to 16,080 in 1989/90 while the number in arts-related courses jumped from 15,269 to 21,410 during the same period.[110]

Although the total student enrolment in the universities was low, the demand for admission slots was high. For instance, in 1990, JAMB received 290,296 applications for placement in universities, out of which only 48,504 gained admissions. This represented only 16 per cent of applicants.

More than 80 per cent of candidates denied admissions were from the South. Consequently, a high-pressure bottleneck developed for new candidates with each passing year. Besides, the incidence of exam cancellation due to massive malpractices prevented many potential candidates from securing university admission. This situation has continued annually since the establishment of JAMB in 1977.[111]

Reaffirming its emphasis on technological and science-based education, in January 1990, the federal government launched the First National Rolling Plan (FNRP), 1990–92, which restated that the doctrine of rationalization, consolidation, and cost-effectiveness to be the "guiding principle in the overall strategy to use the available resources to maintain and improve existing infrastructures and the internal efficiency of the entire educational system."[112] The FNRP also maintained that the various cost-reduction and cost-recovery measures started during the preceding plan period, such as removal of the subsidy on student feeding and movement towards off-campus accommodation for students would remain. Given the limited resources available and the scarcity of paid employment in the organized labour market, the FNRP aimed

> at consolidation and maintenance of existing facilities. For this reason no new universities will be established during the rolling plan period 1990–1992 and any state government wishing to do so will receive no assistance whatsoever from the federal government.[113]

The FNRP allocated a total amount of ₦285 million to all the federal universities. This accounted for about 35 per cent of the total allocation for the education sector, showing a reduction in the previous pattern whereby universities received a predominantly higher amount. This reduction was explained by the federal government's new emphasis on training a middle-level technical workforce from the polytechnics and technical colleges.[114] However, the FNRP underscored the government's determination to reduce poverty and hunger when it stated that the newly established universities of agriculture at Makurdi and Abeokuta would be "sufficiently funded in order to make the desired impact on the nation's food production programme."[115] By converting two universities of technology to that of agriculture and making huge financial allocations to these universities, it was clear that the federal government aimed to produce agriculturalists to help in alleviating hunger. This did not constitute massification because only a few segments of university-eligible candidates desired to study agriculture.

At the thirteenth annual seminar of the CVC in 1990, the president reaffirmed his commitment to implement the provision of the FNRP and cautioned the academic community, except the universities of agriculture, against excessive optimism. He informed the vice-chancellors that the problems facing the universities were the direct consequence of government's "shrinking financial resources."[116] According to the president, "the insatiable demand for university education" had combined with the "economic difficulties facing the country" to affect the proper funding of universities. He maintained that "the universities should always bear in mind that they constitute only a part of the national education system [and] in spite of the competing demands from other sectors of our public life, the Federal Government remains resolutely committed to ensure that the universities survive."[117] By using the word "survive," it was apparent that the president was not prepared to embark on further establishment or expansion of university facilities but instead sought to cope with the consequences of past experiments with massification as well as to control the process.

Conclusion

What is remarkable about the period between 1983 and 1990 was the negative impact of the rationalization policies of the Buhari and Babangida governments on university expansion. By suspending further proliferation of universities due to the ailing economy, the federal government unsuccessfully sought to consolidate and re-position the existing universities to make effective contributions to national economic recovery. Owing to the drastic reduction in government financial grants, the universities lacked sufficient funds to build new facilities, let alone maintain the existing ones. Consequently, the existing facilities in virtually all universities deteriorated. Massification suffered. Nevertheless, another increase in oil revenue in August 1990 due to the first Gulf War compelled Babangida to re-think his university policy in favour of expansion, resulting in the fifth push for massification, 1990–2000.