

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

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The Politics of Colonial Education

The overriding complaint was that there was not enough education – of any kind – for the masses of the people. The key to the understanding of the whole problem of education in Africa is the appreciation of the fact that the whole region thirsts for knowledge. The wealthy and the poor, the aristocrats and the lowest peasants, Christians, Moslems and the “pagans” cry for it.

– KENNETH O. DIKE, 1962

Introduction

Nigeria’s passion for higher education in the twentieth century was never in doubt; what was at issue was the provision of such education in sufficient quantities. Mass education was the priority neither of the European missionaries nor of the British colonial administrators. Consequently, throughout the colonial period, unmet demands for educational opportunities as well as the short supply of trained personnel for public and private sector services characterized British education policy. Dissatisfied with this situation, nationalists pushed not only for the expansion of primary and secondary school education but also demanded for an institution of higher learning in the country. Although a higher institution was established, access remained a problem. Besides, southerners outnumbered northerners in school enrolment, thus the existing mutual suspicion between the two areas. This chapter examines the origins and objectives of Western

education during the colonial period, the forces leading to the successful demand for the establishment of the University College of Ibadan (UCI) in 1948, and the causes and implications of regional education imbalance. It shows how the short supply of university education and the tensions and conflicts generated by the educational disparity between the North and the South largely shaped Nigeria's postcolonial higher education politics, making a mass education program an attractive political tool in pursuing economic development and fostering national integration.

Western Education and the Making of Nigeria

Missionaries introduced Western education in Africa. Before the advent of Western education in Nigeria, two types of education systems existed: the traditional educational system transmitted informally through everyday living and the formal Islamic system that was introduced in the northern part of Nigeria as early as the fifteenth century. Under these systems, educational opportunity was open and available to all members of the society. Precolonial education “acted as an important method of transmission of cultural identity” and inculcated “in children the behavior and knowledge needed for the part they were to play in society.”¹ As Paul Desalmand shows, precolonial education in Nigeria was provided by all members of the society; it was directly related to the needs of the society; and it was the concern of everyone and comprehensive in character.²

Intrinsically, indigenous education systems provided four basic educational competencies that UNESCO later adopted and promoted: learning to know, learning to do, learning to be, and learning to live together.³ Intended to continue from ‘womb to tomb,’ they provided lower and higher levels of knowledge in history, identity, culture, and religion, among other areas, so as to develop the total personality of individuals from childhood to adulthood (learning to know and learning to be). In addition, they provided practical skills in agriculture, animal husbandry, hunting, and crafts, among others (learning to do). Finally, they inculcated a sense of civic duty in members of society for the sake of peace and order (learning to live together). However, the advent of Western education through European missionaries and mission schools in the 1840s changed the dynamics of

the pre-existing education systems. Although those educational systems operated side by side with the Western system, over time the new education system, introduced by the missionaries and imposed on Nigeria by the British colonial government, came to become the foremost tool of social mobility.

Formal schools came into existence in Nigeria with the arrival of Thomas Birch Freeman in 1842.⁴ Earlier, the Portuguese traders, who, in the early 1500s, visited Benin in southeast Nigeria, and São Thomé, off the coast of Nigeria, saw education as an important tool in the spread of Christianity. Missionaries who visited the Oba of Benin in 1515 taught his sons and the sons of other chiefs the Christian faith. The activities of missionaries during this period, however, were limited to a few trading centres, and with the growth of the transatlantic slave trade in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, “the legitimate trading centers declined and made no educational impact upon the people living in the interior of the country.”⁵ Missionary activity in Africa gathered momentum in the mid-nineteenth century as a by-product of the transatlantic slave trade. As part of the British strategy to stop the slave trade, Thomas Fowell Buxton, a prominent member of the British parliament and vice president of the Church Missionary Society (CMS), urged the cooperation of the government and the missionary societies in the ‘deliverance’ of Africa. As Buxton advocated,

Let missionaries and schoolmasters, the plough and the spade, go together and agriculture will flourish; the avenues to legitimate commerce will be opened; confidence between man and man will be inspired; whilst civilization will advance as the natural effect and Christianity operate as the proximate cause, of this happy change.⁶

Largely influenced by Buxton’s urging, European missionaries, traders, and explorers flocked into Africa. By the mid-1800s, a number of missionary bodies had made inroads into Nigeria.⁷ Eager to convert the natives to Christianity, these missionary bodies established schools in which they emphasized religious instruction. As Father Wauter, a Catholic missionary in Western Nigeria, pointedly stated, “We knew the best way to make

conversion in 'pagan' countries was to open school.... So, when the district of Ekiti-Ondo was opened ... we started schools even before there was any church or mission house."⁸ Because the natives could not read or write in English, the establishment of schools became a priority for European missionaries, and, as Elias Shrent, a missionary, puts it, "I have a low opinion of Christians who are not able to read their bible."⁹ Inspired by the calling to spread Christianity, missionaries encouraged a policy of conversion through village schools. Admission to mission schools usually led to the conversion of the pupils to the new religion.

The curriculum of mission schools emphasized the four *Rs* (religion, reading, writing, and arithmetic) and therefore produced "the much needed evangelists, clerks and teachers for the colonial society."¹⁰ Mostly, the education provided by the missionaries was not relevant to the immediate needs of the people. In the report of the Phelps-Stocks commission on education in Africa, Thomas Jesse Jones states that missionary education failed to "realize the full significance of education in the development of the African people." He further states that, in "limiting education to class room instruction in book, missionaries were following the ideals prevailing in their home country ... [and] have therefore been strangely indifferent to the economic value of agriculture, and little concerned with the health and morals of the people."¹¹ Yet, the missionaries laid the foundation for both the future development of education and the emergence of the political elite in Nigeria, a fact that many scholars recognize. In *Christian Missions in Nigeria, 1841-1891*, Ajayi thoroughly discusses the role played by missionaries in the spread of Christianity and Western education in Nigeria, especially in the south. These missionaries, as Ajayi stresses, shaped the emergence of a new class and therefore played a critical role in the country's political history.¹² According to him, "in their linguistic and educational work, in their economic policies, and above all, in the class of Western-educated they were seeking to create, [missionary] influence covered the whole country."¹³ British consuls, who had increasingly established effective political control of the region, modified or broadened the educational curriculum of mission schools to suit colonial objectives.

The establishment of colonial administration in Nigeria began shortly after the Berlin Conference of 1884-85. Britain had acquired political influence in many parts of Nigeria through treaties of protection with local

rulers and later through conquest. Before 1900, the British had carved out the following territories in Nigeria: the Colony and Protectorate of Lagos (1886); the Niger Coast Protectorate (1893); and the Northern Protectorate (1900). In 1906, the Niger Coast Protectorate merged with the Colony and Protectorate of Lagos to become the Southern Protectorate. Modern Nigeria came into existence in 1914 when the British amalgamated the diverse peoples in the Southern and Northern Protectorates in an artificial political entity called Nigeria. A modern nation-state was born, composed of more than 250 ethnic groups, with diverse religions, languages, and cultures. Sir Frederick Lugard emerged as the first governor-general (1914–19). The unification of these two areas was not borne out of pressure from the local political groups. It was more or less an attempt to create a modern Nigeria for Britain’s administrative convenience. As Osadolor states,

Lugard considered it unnecessary to carve up a territory undivided by natural boundaries, more so since one portion (the South) was wealthy enough to commit resources to even “unimportant” programmes while the other portion (the North), could not balance its budget necessitating the British taxpayer being called upon to bear the larger share of even the cost of its administration. This partly explains the amalgamation, an act which provoked bitter controversy at the time, arousing the resentment of educated elites and of some British administrators. It, nevertheless, saddled the country with an issue – the relationship between North and South – that has dominated its politics to this day.¹⁴

The political, social, economic, and even educational problems that dominated Nigeria’s history since the amalgamation of 1914 came to be dubbed “The National Question.” This question, as the postcolonial governments articulated, was concerned “with the problems that arise when a country, such as Nigeria, is made up of many language/ethnic groups that are at different levels of development hence the need to solve these problems, and find an equitable basis for the peaceful and harmonious co-existence of these groups.”¹⁵ That process was not easy and many Nigerians saw the union as a mistake; prominent among them was Tafawa Balewa, who later

became the country's first prime minister. In a statement on the floor of the Federal House of Representatives, Lagos, Balewa declared that "Since the amalgamation of southern and northern provinces in 1914, Nigeria has existed as one country only on paper.... It is still far from being united. Nigerian unity is only a British intention for the country."¹⁶ Obafemi Awolowo, leading southern nationalists, echoed Balewa's sentiment when he wrote that "Nigeria is not a nation. It is a mere geographical expression. There are no 'Nigerians' in the same sense there are 'English' or 'Welsh' or 'French'. The word Nigeria is merely a distinctive appellation to distinguish those who lived within the boundaries of Nigeria from those who do not."¹⁷

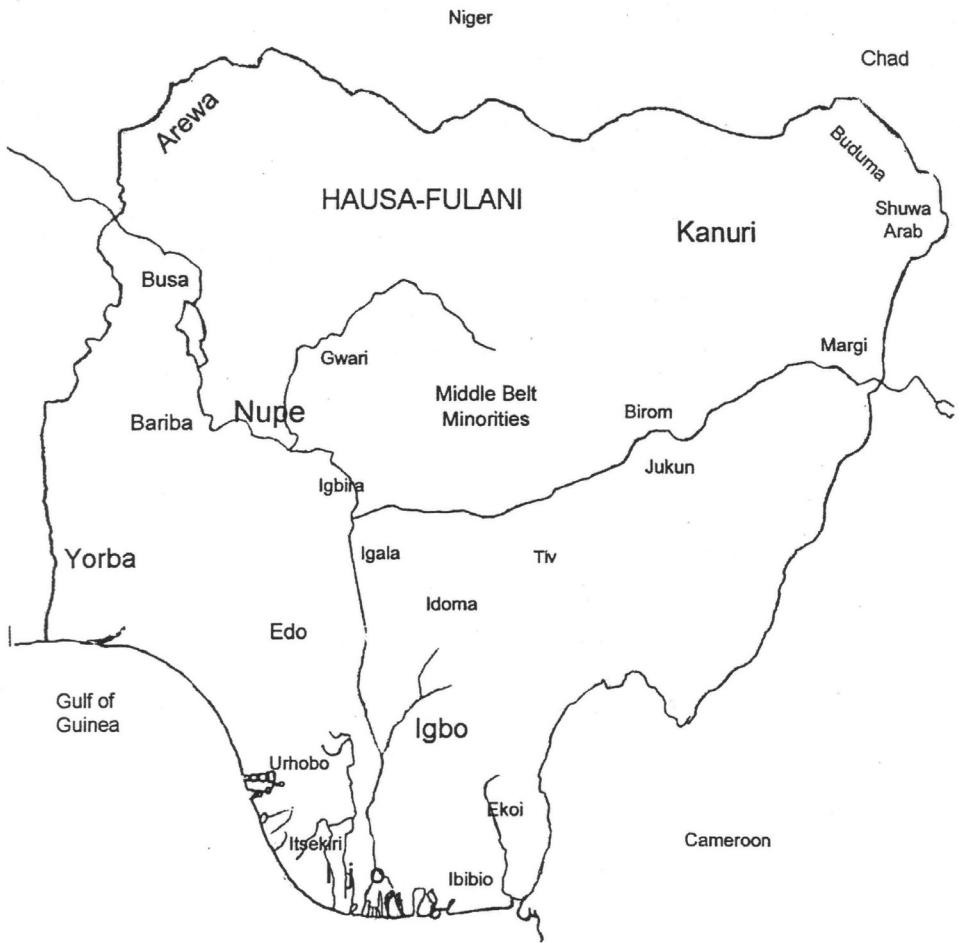
Having effectively established a colonial government, the control of education became crucial in administering Nigeria. Colonial authorities initially allowed missionaries to dominate the education sector, but they increasingly came to understand the importance of consolidating imperial rule through education. This meant direct government involvement. Accordingly, the British promulgated the 1882 Colonial Educational Ordinance for West Africa (revised in 1887 and 1905). The education ordinance stipulated, among other things, that "the subject of teaching shall be the reading and writing of the English language."¹⁸ It regulated educational activities and practices in Nigeria and provided the colonialists with the opportunity to justify colonialism, which included bringing to the colonized people the "blessings of civilization" and creating a body of literate, obedient, organized, and productive natives who would be indispensable in the exploitation of Nigeria's resources. In addition to the religious instruction provided by missionary education, the British encouraged the reading and writing of the English language, which they considered a proper medium of communication and reporting to the imperial government as well as a powerful tool for cultural assimilation. Other subjects included arithmetic and British history and geography. The British educational philosophy sought to create a group of Nigerians sufficiently literate and skilled to achieve further integration of the colonized into the mainstream of the colonial economy and administration as clerks, messengers, and interpreters. A British educator, H.S. Scott, stated that the government's view of education was creating "useful citizens," which means "literally citizens who would be of use to us. The conception was one of exploitation and

development for the benefit of the people of Great Britain – it was to this purpose that such education as given was directed.”¹⁹

Due financial constraints as well as traditions obtainable in Europe, both the missionaries and colonial authorities did not invest in educational expansion in response to many Nigerians who yearned for Western education. In a letter in which he complained about the depressing nature of his work, a CMS mission secretary wrote:

My work is pathetic in the extreme low, in one aspect: almost every week I have to turn away deputations from both near and distant begging us to come teach them.²⁰

Meanwhile, the division of Nigeria into three unequal regions in 1939 by Henry Bourdillon, Nigeria’s governor-general between 1935 and 1940, set the stage for conflict between the North and the South. For administrative purposes, Bourdillon divided the country into Northern, Western, and Eastern regions, with Lagos as the administrative centre. The boundaries of these regions were conterminous with the three largest ethnic groups: the northern region with the Hausa-Fulani, the western region with the Yoruba, and the eastern region with the Igbo. The deficiencies in this division marked the beginning of the fear of domination that characterised Nigeria’s political history and mostly reinforced by the educational disparity between the predominantly Christian South and the Muslim North. The North had 729,815 square kilometres of territory and about 16.8 million people. The figures for the other regions were as follows: the east had 119,308 sq km and 7.9 million people; the west contained 117,524 sq km and about 6.1 million people. Lagos was 70 sq km and 273,000 people. As these figures show, the North held 75 per cent of the land mass as well as 54 per cent of the population. Because the North was bigger than the two other regions put together (as shown in Map 1), southern elites feared potential northern domination after independence: hence the unavoidable regional rivalry, a situation for which the British bear primary responsibility. As Apollos Nwauwa puts it, “While it could be said that under British rule efforts toward unity were begun with the formation of Nigeria on the outbreak of World War 1, paradoxically, it was the same British who sowed



MAP OF NIGERIA SHOWING MAJOR ETHNIC GROUPS.
 (COURTESY OF R.C. NJOKU.)

the seeds of disunity when [they] divided Nigeria into the three unequal and ill-fated regions.”²¹

The geographical, political, and religious factors that shaped the history of educational development in Nigeria laid the foundation to the North-South educational gap. According to Dike, this disparity “has been the result of the differences in timing and intensity of impact of modern education on the two sections of the country.”²² Missionaries first settled in the coastal regions in the south before they moved into the interior. While southerners were the first to embrace Christianity and Western education, northerners pursued Islamic/Arabic education and in many cases resisted the new education, a situation that was worsened by the Puddah system in the North where women and girls were deprived of access to Western education.²³ However, Islamic schools had provided a source of learning for Muslims for centuries before European incursion in Africa. In 1900 when the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria was established, there were, according to Lord Lugard, about 250,000 students in the 20,000 Koranic schools.²⁴

Although proximity to the coast gave southerners advantage in educational attainment over northerners, “the more important factor was the hostility of the natural rulers of the North to Christian teaching and the Western type of education, and the British policy of supporting them in this opposition.”²⁵ Throughout the colonial period, missionaries controlled primary and secondary education. According to Coleman, “As late as 1942, they controlled 99 percent of the schools, and more than 97 percent of the students in [Africa] were enrolled in mission school.”²⁶ Given the missionary hold on education, the spread of Christianity and Western education became interwoven. Murray brilliantly summarized it in *The School in the Bush* thus,

To all intents and purposes the school is the Church. Right away in the bush or in the forest the two are one, and the village teacher is also the village evangelists. An appreciation of this fact is cardinal in all considerations of African education.²⁷

The “general antipathy for Western-style education” among the predominantly Muslim North created and maintained the educational gap between

the two areas, especially since Western education not only became the yardstick to measure individual achievements but also a model for future socio-political development in colonial and postcolonial Nigeria.²⁸ Of course, the North would have been educationally advantaged than the south, had Islamic education been adopted as the only means of social mobility in Nigeria. There were 1,100 primary school pupils in the North in 1914 while the south had 35,700. As pressure for educational opportunities in the south increased in the 1920s, many community and private schools emerged, largely financed by local contributions. As shown in Tables 1.1 and 1.2, in spite of having more population than the other regions combined, the northern region had far less community schools. This is because southerners not only embraced mission education but also raised money to build schools in order to supplement the limited education provided by the missionaries. Northerners, on the other hand, saw no reason for that. In “Educational Imbalance: Its Extent, History, Dangers and Correction in Nigeria,” Jubril Aminu, a former executive secretary of the Nigerian Universities Commission (NUC) and federal minister of education sums the major cause of the North-South educational gap thus:

The first and foremost cause is the fact that Western Education came much earlier in the South than in the North. Even in the South, the early efforts were made by Christian Missionaries. The concomitant proselytizing activities of those educationists rendered them unacceptable in the Muslim North.²⁹

In his desire to forestall potential conflict between mission schools and the Muslim North, Lord Lugard pledged (at the inauguration of the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria on 1 January 1900) to abide by the agreement with the emirs that included, among other things, preventing missionary work in the North.³⁰ This policy remained for much of the colonial period, and even when the government established experimental schools in the North, the pace of growth was slow. The schools were open only to the sons of chiefs. These schools, the colonists hoped, would help “turn out future [northern] leaders” who would be instrumental in the successful implementation of British indirect rule.³¹

Table 1.1: Ethnic/Community Schools Up to 1969.

Period	Northern Region	Eastern Region	Western Region	Mid-West Region	Total
Up to 1959	3	11	15	1	30
1960–69	10	12	13	2	37
Total	13	23	28	3	67

Source: J.M. Kosemani, “The Ethnic Factor in Educational Disparity in Nigeria,” *Bensu Journal of Education* 3, no. 1 (1992): 15.

Table 1.2: Private Schools in Nigeria Up to 1969.

Period	Northern Region	Eastern Region	Western Region	Mid-West Region	Total
Up to 1959	2	9	9	5	25
1960–69	0	10	24	15	49
Total	2	19	33	20	74

Source: J.M. Kosemani, “The Ethnic Factor in Educational Disparity in Nigeria,” *Bensu Journal of Education* 3, no. 1 (1992): 16a.

Given the educational disparity, regional competition and conflict was inevitable. As early as 1944, the *Daily Service* newspaper predicted “an era of wholesome rivalry” among the dominant ethnic groups: Igbo, Yoruba, and Hausa.³² Adeyemo Alakija, the president of the Egbe Omo Oduduwa (a pan-Yoruba organization in the west), in a direct declaration of what he saw as the Yoruba role in Nigerian politics, noted in 1948 a great future for Yoruba children in which “they will hold their own among other tribes of Nigeria” and resist being “relegated to the background in the future.”³³ Similarly, on the anticipated role of the Igbos, Nnamdi Azikiwe urged them not to shrink from their responsibility as leaders.³⁴ The Hausa ethnic group in the North similarly expressed apprehension over the likely domination of the more-educated Christian south, comprising the east and west. Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, who later became the first prime minister of independent Nigeria, expressed concern over steady migration of

southerners to the North, whose presence he believed threatened to displace northerners in the colonial civil service.³⁵ Because southerners had more Western-educated people, the editor of the *Gaskiya Ta Fi Kwabo* newspaper warned against early independence for Nigeria. According to the paper, if the British granted Nigeria early independence, southerners would dominate the country:

It is the southerner who has the power in the north. They have control of the railway stations; of the Post Offices; of Government Hospitals; of the canteens; the majority employed in the Kaduna Secretariat and in the Public Works Department are all Southerners.³⁶

Development of Higher Education

West African intellectuals such as Edward Blyden, James Horton, J.E. Casely-Hayford, and Nnamdi Azikiwe had been demanding the establishment of universities in Africa since the second half of the nineteenth century.³⁷ Except for Fourah Bay College in Sierra Leone, founded by the Church Missionary Society in 1827 to train Africans as schoolmasters, catechists, and clergymen, nothing was done until 1934 when Yaba Higher College, a vocational institution, was established in Nigeria.³⁸ The British hoped the institution would train Nigerians to meet the need for a lower cadre of officials for the colonial service. Admission to Yaba was accordingly dependent on the availability of positions in the civil service. The college offered courses in engineering, medicine, agriculture, education, and arts, leading to diploma awards. Since the college did not award degrees, the promotion opportunities of its graduates were limited. Because graduates of the college were rated as inferior in terms of income and rank, nationalists attacked the college, and, according to Dike, they did not regard the institution “as an adequate answer to their higher education aspirations.”³⁹ Nationalists therefore intensified their demands for a degree-awarding institution in the colony similar to those available in England – to obtain degrees that they hoped would qualify them for senior service positions.

As Kenneth Mellanby recalled, Nigerians showed passionate desires “to be given the opportunity to qualify for senior service posts.”⁴⁰

Despite the demands for a local university in Africa, Britain did not immediately change its policy for strategic and practical reasons. First, the British sought to avoid producing graduates who would demand to occupy the few available higher posts in government. As Lord Hailey stressed, “The considerations which decide the character of higher education are largely political, for the type of instruction given depends on the view held of the place in society which the educated African may be expected to fill.”⁴¹ Since there were few positions for African fill, it did not make sense for the British to produce educated men who would become, as Charles Wood bluntly stated, “depositories of discontent ... detractors and opponents and grumblers.”⁴²

Under the system of indirect rule, introduced by the British to govern their colonies in Africa, there was no place for highly educated Nigerians. The system of indirect rule, especially before the Second World War, involved the retention of the traditional pre-colonial political institutions, utilizing ‘illiterate’ indigenous rulers in governance while excluding highly educated Nigerians who had obtained their degrees abroad. Bad blood ensued. European visitors to Nigeria commented on the tension and animosity between colonialists and Nigerians who had obtained higher education overseas. According to one observer, the relationship was “delicate and difficult.”⁴³ Likewise, Charles Roden Buxton, an English philanthropist and politician, stated that “Few white people have a good word to say for the educated Africans.”⁴⁴ This situation was not surprising. Since British policy alienated educated Nigerians, they strongly opposed colonialism, and colonial officials had good reasons to dread them, especially the so-called ‘radicals’ who received higher education training in the United States. As James Coleman confirmed, “It was the educated who ... provoked disturbances in the provinces, published vituperative articles in the local press, and made life miserable and insecure for British administrators. There was nothing a district officer, a resident, or a governor dreaded more than political disturbances and unrest during his tour of duty.”⁴⁵ In these circumstances, colonial authorities frowned on the idea of establishing universities in Nigeria to either train or to expand the educated elite, as the nationalists demanded. Given the strong opposition to the colonial government

emanating from the educated elite, “the expansion of the educated class remained an anathema.”⁴⁶

Second, the colonial director of education, E.R.J. Hussey, did not want to hurry the establishment of universities in the colonies in order to maintain the high standard of British higher education. Instead, he proposed a three-stage scheme in the 1930s: the production of candidates for available positions in the public and private sector by West African colleges; the later affiliation of these colleges with an English university for the purpose of granting external degrees; and, finally, the granting of local autonomy to the colleges. Consideration of academic standards underscored this proposal. As Hussey declared, “We must at all cost avoid giving what we proclaim to be a university degree unless we can safeguard standards.”⁴⁷

Third, faced with the economic recession of the 1930s, the British, who had not provided adequate funding to Yaba, could not contemplate shouldering the additional financial burden of another higher education institution. In the 1930s, the return that the British government obtained from Nigeria’s primary products was extremely low, and there were very limited funds available for other development projects. In fact, during the Second World War, a lack of sufficient funds compelled the British to reduce their funding allocations to Yaba while many members of the institution’s slender staff were conscripted for war service. Worse of all, in 1939, the army took over Yaba’s buildings and converted them to a military hospital. As a result, the engineering students moved to the CMS Grammar School (equivalent to a secondary school in the United States) in Lagos, while other departments relocated to Achimota College, in the Gold Coast (now Ghana).⁴⁸ Faced with resource constraints, establishing a university in Nigeria was the least priority of the British. Many Nigerians to their frustration travelled overseas for university training.⁴⁹

Last, another common excuse in objecting to establishing universities in the colonies was the slow expansion of primary and secondary school education in most territories since the 1900s. West African governors had insisted that the pyramidal growth of primary and secondary education should be accomplished first before a university was contemplated.⁵⁰ In contrast, however, the report submitted to the Advisory Committee on Education in the Colonies (ACEC) in 1940 by the Mouat Jones sub-committee that reviewed the recommendations of West African governors

stated that university education should progress together with other lower levels of education. Employing the analogy of a volcano that “built up its cone in all stages at once,” the sub-committee stressed the relationships between primary, secondary, and university educational structures.⁵¹ In December 1940, the ACEC endorsed the recommendations of the Mouat Jones sub-committee and asked the secretary of state to appoint a commission to review the university question. This step was a turning point in Africa’s education development and occurred in the context of the Second World War. In fact, as Nwauwa notes, “from the late November 1942, when Allied victory became more likely, colonial development and welfare programmes were revived along with the university question.”⁵² Britain had finally realized that it needed to establish a university to facilitate the training of leaders in the colonies who would carry out colonial development schemes that, according to Oliver Stanley (the secretary of state for the colonies between 1942 and 1945), had suffered due to shortage of trained personnel.⁵³

Second World War politics shaped Britain’s overseas higher education policies. Britain needed the continued support from its colonies to wage a successful war against Nazism and Fascism and thus decided to embark on social programs designed to appease the increasingly agitated nationalists in the colonies who yearned not only for the establishment of institutions of higher learning but also for socio-economic development. In effect, the British Parliament passed the Colonial Development and Welfare Act in 1940 that aimed at addressing, among other things, the long-felt educational needs of its colonies. Supporting the initiative, Malcolm MacDonald, a member of the British parliament and later secretary of state for the colonies between 1938 and 1940, noted the contributions of overseas colonies in the Second World War “by gifts of treasure, by production of essential foodstuffs and raw materials, and by the eager raising of Colonial military units far in excess of anything that they did at a similar period in the last war.”⁵⁴ In a sense, the Act sought to appease the colonies notwithstanding MacDonald’s insistence that it was not “a bribe or reward for the colonies’ support in this supreme crisis.”⁵⁵

In line with the new colonial attitude occasioned by the Second World War, the British appointed the Elliot and Asquith Commissions in 1943 to examine the university question for Africans. The reports of

both commissions appeared simultaneously in 1945 and addressed various aspects of the university question; they constituted the blueprint for the development of university education in Nigeria as well as in other British colonies. The Asquith Commission, appointed to articulate the fundamental principles needed to guide the promotion of teaching and research in higher education and the development of university colleges in the British colonies, called for the creation of universities overseas to produce local leaders as a precondition for independence. It recommended a residential university college in a special relationship with the University of London and insisted on high academic standards in student admissions and staffing.⁵⁶ Anticipating the eventual independence of the British colonies overseas, the commission hoped the institution would help “produce men and women with the standards of public service and capacity for leadership which self-rule required.”⁵⁷

While the Asquith report supported the idea of developing higher education in Africa in anticipation of imminent independence, it did not view full independence as imminent. Even though the British encouraged constitutional developments in Nigeria from 1946 to 1954 with the purpose of granting self-government, they did not anticipate the immediate independence of Nigeria. Thus, it would be quite deceptive to equate self-government, as conceptualized by the British, with full independence. In the British tradition, internal self-government or responsible government meant government with full responsibility for local affairs. This explains why as late as 1955, the British Cabinet, troubled by the political implications of the terms ‘self-government’ and ‘independence,’ resolved that the term ‘self-government’ should be used in all references to the constitutional development of the colonies, stating that the term “independence in this context should be discontinued.”⁵⁸ Clearly, the British were playing games in the face of U.S. and UN disapproval of imperialism as the Cold War heated up.

The Elliot Commission, on the other hand, had a limited mandate. Unlike the Asquith Commission, the Elliot Commission was established to “report on the organization and facilities of the existing centers of higher education in British West Africa and make recommendations regarding future university development in that area.”⁵⁹ The commission acknowledged that “the need for educated Africans in West Africa in general already

far outruns the supply, present and potential.”⁶⁰ To this end, it specifically recommended the establishment of a university in Nigeria whose students would obtain degrees from the University of London.⁶¹ However, the commission did not envisage mass university education, as was the practice in Europe; instead, they espoused education for the few who would take over leadership positions at independence. The minority members of the Elliot Commission, Julian Huxley and Creech Jones, were even more conservative and short-sighted when they insisted that there would be enough students for only one university in the whole British West Africa.⁶²

The report issued by the Elliot Commission was a turning point in Nigeria’s higher education. Following its recommendations – and in line with the broad principles outlined by the Asquith Commission – UCI was established in 1948. Nigerians hailed the institution as a fulfillment of years of demands for the establishment of a higher institution in Nigeria. As the Elliot Commission suggested, the college immediately entered into a special relationship with the University of London and was “by and large a sort of a carbon copy of the newer university institutions in Britain, most of which were at one stage or the other god-fathered by London University.”⁶³ The curriculum was not modified to meet Nigeria’s peculiar needs. The emphasis was on arts courses such as history, classics, and English, and pure science courses such as chemistry, physics, and mathematics. The students prepared for and wrote the University of London degree examinations. The Inter-University Council for Higher Education, a body that monitored higher education development in the colonies, appointed all the academic and administrative officers of the college from London on behalf of the University of London. Undeniably, the college was run according to an educational philosophy in line with the British or classical model of a university, which viewed a university as an ivory tower preoccupied with the training of the elite.

The quality of education obtained at UCI, as Ashby pointed out, was “beyond reproach,” as the institution set “standards in Nigeria at a level which would be a credit to any country in the world.”⁶⁴ In defence of the standards of an institution whose degree was internationally recognized, S.O. Awokoya, the minister of education in the Western Region, said: “We don’t want another Yaba.”⁶⁵ Similarly, a suggestion made by several critics of UCI that Nigeria should adopt the Egyptian pattern of higher

education, characterized by easy entrance, diverse classes, non-residential students, and night classes, was rejected, as captured in the editorial pages of the *Lagos Daily Times*.⁶⁶ This is not surprising, since the Nigerian elite would have frowned upon any university that was not designed according to the pattern obtainable in London. They would have accused the British of running a 'slummy' second-rate university in Nigeria.

Access, Economic Development, and Nation-Building

Colonial authorities did not see education as an investment nor did they relate it to African needs. By the late 1940s, it became clear to many Nigerians that, given its narrow curriculum and lack of facilities, UCI would not satisfy the demand for places or address the human resource needs of the country. The curriculum was to a certain extent inappropriate. In the sciences, for instance, UCI emphasized pure science subjects such as mathematics, physics, and chemistry, and neglected applied science courses. Ten years after its founding, the college was not offering courses in engineering, economics, law, geology, anthropology, sociology, or public administration, and it took eight years to establish a department of education.⁶⁷ As Tai Solarin further notes,

During the first ten years of the existence of our first university, agriculture was not taught, even though anybody could have thought it should have been the first subject on the curriculum. Between 1948 and for almost ten years later, medicine did not appear on the curriculum of our premier university ... when anybody could have expected medicine to be the second faculty. What then were the subjects that glowed on the curriculum of the first university? English Language and Literature, Latin and Greek, and Religious Studies.⁶⁸

Worse still was that admission to Ibadan, which was obtained through either direct entry or concessional admission, was highly restrictive.⁶⁹ The entrance examination at Ibadan was highly competitive and more demanding than in many overseas universities.⁷⁰ Many students who were

classified as non-university material and were denied admission owing to the stringent admission policy of Ibadan ironically proceeded to America and Europe where they successfully pursued university education, often graduating with distinctions. To worsen the admission problem at UCI, the annual intake of students in the college was not decided by the number of qualified candidates or even by the country's needs, but principally by the availability of "sleeping accommodation [at] the elite residential halls in the College."⁷¹ Moreover, the North-South educational gap, especially in university enrolment, continued to favour southerners. Between 1948 and 1952, the percentage of students coming from the regions shows that 97 per cent of students at UCI came from the western and eastern regions while only 3 per cent were from the North.⁷² This gap was bound to create potential tension in regional relations. Collectively, the narrow curriculum, lopsided regional enrolment, the exacting entrance requirements, and the few spaces in the residential halls constrained enrolment at UCI. Thus, by 1954, there were only 406 students, forcing many qualified candidates, who were denied the opportunity to obtain university education at Ibadan, to travel overseas. As shown in Table 1.3, more Nigerians studied abroad than at UCI.

Dissatisfied with the university's failure to satisfy increasing demand for university education, the new institution came under attack by Nigerian nationalists, who saw it as "conservative, cautious, elitist, and ill-equipped for pioneering a new University in an alien culture."⁷³ E.E. Esau, the general secretary of the Nigerian Union of Teachers, called for the expansion of Ibadan's curriculum by suggesting the establishment of a faculty of education to train teachers.⁷⁴ Editorials in one of the leading newspapers in Nigeria supported Esau's call.⁷⁵ In the same way, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, a leading nationalist from the east, questioned the narrow curriculum of the institution, a curriculum that was not only unrelated to the needs of the society but restricted student intake as well. According to Azikiwe, Nigeria could not "afford to produce or to encourage the continued production of upper class parasites who shall prey upon a stagnant sterile class of workers and peasants."⁷⁶ He argued that the number of students the college trained did not match the amount of public expenditure on the institution and thus dismissed UCI as "a million pound baby simply because it knows that whenever it cries it will be accorded a million pound

Table 1.3: Nigerian Students in Universities (1948–53).

Year	UCI	UK	USA and Canada	Total
1948–49	210	510	32	752
1949–50	298	719	104	1,121
1950–51	322	938	301	1,561
1951–52	338	1,190	361	1,889
1952–53	367	1,316	370	2,317

Source: A.B. Fafunwa, *A History of Nigerian Higher Education* (Yaba, Nigeria: Macmillan, 1971), 19–20.

kiss.”⁷⁷ From time to time, columns in newspapers spoke out against UCI. One called on the institution to end the “rigid method of selection of candidates for entrance to the University.”⁷⁸ Another noted that Ibadan was not established “to compete with [the] standards of British institutions.”⁷⁹ There were suggestions that the entrance qualifications should be lowered to hasten Nigerianization.⁸⁰

The demands for the expansion of access to UCI in the 1940s and 1950s reflect Nigeria’s yearnings for higher education and growing dissatisfaction with the elitist British higher education policy. With the exception of the establishment of three colleges of arts, sciences, and technology, the British resisted fundamental changes to their education policy. The colleges did not have university status, and they conducted their courses in arts and sciences at the intermediate level only. The British seemed to have won the day, but the forces at work were too strong to allow the status quo to remain. As nationalists continued their campaign for the expansion of university opportunities, and as Nigeria moved towards independence, the politics of the Cold War and the dynamics of decolonization gradually coincided in the 1950s to make a shift towards massification of university education a crucial element in the country’s postcolonial attempts at foster economic development and promote nation-building.